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WILLIAM MORRIS, EDWARD BURNE-JONES, AND THE KELMSCOTT PRESS:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE *THING* AND A NON-COMMODIFIED MODE OF

VISION

by

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to view William Morris and his work at the Kelmscott Press as a thoroughly modern endeavor, instead of the nostalgic enterprise his work is usually branded as. To do this, this thesis inquires into Morris's ideas about art and experience, and how these ideas are both tied to his ideas of the mediaeval and are the same ideas that will haunt modern artists throughout the twentieth century. In this thesis I argue that how Morris designed the pages produced by him and a long list of collaborators at the Kelmscott Press shows the readers/viewers of Kelmscott books a way to gain pleasure and meaning from the world in a way detached from the capitalist structures that readers/viewers would normally go through to gain these things.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank for my advisor, Michael Grillo, for all the guidance, encouragement, and long talks working through difficult ideas throughout the year that this thesis was ruminating. Without his help, this thesis would surely have missed out on much of the color it now has. I would also like to greatly thank all of my committee members for their support, suggestions, questions, and conversations, which certainly helped both broaden my mind and chisel the idea I've tried to bring words to in this thesis into ever sharper formations. Thank you all.

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Preface: The Eld, the Modern, The World

"Was [William] Morris…an escapist who misled several generations of private-press printers into believing that they could turn the hands of the clock back, or was he rather, in Nikolaus Pevsner's famous phrase, one of the 'pioneers of modern design'?" William S. Peterson muses, at one point, in his *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*.[1] Rather than attempt to the answer the question, Peterson quickly moves on to other topics. However, this thesis will attempt to place Morris as one of Pevsner's "pioneers of modern design," following a thread set out by Peterson earlier in the same book, in which he claims Morris as one in a line of nineteenth century mediaeval revivalists who were forging new paths instead of simply restating the past, stating

> We may perhaps wish to protest that Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin,
> Morris, and others of their outlook idealized the Middle Ages and
> ignored the material benefits of our mechanized civilization; yet
> we fail to do them justice unless we recognize that the Gothic
> Revival was not ultimately an attempt to resuscitate a period style
> of architecture or art but rather a morally powerful protest against
> the psychological and social disintegration produced by the
> modern world.[2]

In relation to Morris's final project, the Kelmscott Press, only two scholars, as far as I know, have picked up this thread proposed by Peterson on which this thesis expands upon and contends with. In a chapter of *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life*, one of the scholars, Florence S. Boos, views Morris through the lens of Henri Lefebvre

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[1] William S. Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 107.
[2] Ibid., 5.

and his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, 1961, 1981), following Peterson in her characterization of Morris, writing "Morris himself, however, vigorously defended his undertaking as a utopian protest against capitalist practices which had destroyed the art of bookmaking, as they had destroyed—or corrupted—everything else."[3] Boos's short study of Morris, the Kelmscott Press, and 'the art of everyday life' offers some tantalizing propositions, but unfortunately only jumps from proposition to proposition across its sixteen pages, never truly looking at any one aspect of the situation, and thus, failing to really get at the heart of the issue for which she aims.

The other scholar picking up the ripe thread left dangling by Peterson is Jeffrey Skoblow, who also grapples with the issue of Morris, through the Kelmcott Press, as a thoroughly modern designer, while working in a thoroughly mediaeval-esque language, in an unfortunately short, eighteen-page chapter within *The Victorian Illustrated Book.* Skoblow's study, which views the Kelmscott through the lens of Walter Benjamin and the American poet Charles Bernstein, attempts to place Morris as an early postmodernist grappling with the physicality of the object that is the book and the power of his Kelmscott designs to push readers "beyond reading." While Skoblow's thesis in writing about Morris, which he defines as

> the capstone of Morris's lifelong effort to revive and renew a
> stunning array of precapistalist aesthetic forms, the Kelmscott
> Press is famous for its presentation of the Book as an object of
> total design, with dense Gothic fonts, often sumptuous
> ornamentation, and woodcut illustrations all harmonized in the
> pleasure of the eye, the pleasure of the hand, the pleasure of the
> body at rest, reading,

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[3] Florence S. Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," in *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life*, ed. Wendy Parkins (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2010), 65.

is essentially the same as my own, the aims of his thesis differ from the aims of my own in several respects.[4] While Skoblow is just as interested in the deep power of the Kelmscott books to reach places that language cannot reach (he begins with a quote from Morris stating, "Words fail us"), he takes the physicality of a Kelmscott book and uses it as a way towards Morris's politics, towards a way to help understand the vague abstractions of our thoughts that we cannot put words to.[5] The realized physicality of the human body in contact with the physicality of a Kelmscott book is only a piece of the argument that Skoblow uses to reach his goal; for this thesis, understanding this relation, and its purpose in society, is the goal. Skoblow, perhaps because of the short length of his study, perhaps because of the goals of his study, spends more time talking around the objects that are the Kelmscott books, instead of spending time trying to describe the experience of interacting with a Kelmscott book, something I will try to remedy throughout the course of this thesis.

With this goal in mind, instead of viewing Morris and the Kelmscott through a social lens (though I don't shy away from it), and the ideas of writers like Lefebvre, Benjamin, and Bernstein (though they show up here and there), I turn to writers on phenomenology and experience, particularly Lee Ufan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Susan Sontag, to help conjure the power of experience, and particularly the experience of the Kelmscott, and how the effect of the Kelmscott was itself conjured by Morris.

Like Lee and Sontag, writing about minimalist and post-minimalist art in the 1960s and 1970s, and like Merleau-Ponty before them, and like a long line stretching

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[4] Jeffrey Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," in *The Victorian Illustrated Book*, ed. Richard Maxwell (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 239.
[5] Ibid.

back to what we call ancient history (St. Augustine commented in his *The Confessions*,

that "men go forth, and admire lofty mountains and broad seas, and roaring torrents, and

the ocean, and the course of stars, and forget themselves"), Morris too was intrigued by

physical experience, and physical experience particularly through the sense of vision,

leading to some sort of transcendent experience (for as Merleau-Ponty notes, "Vision is

not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given me for being

absent at the fission of begin from the inside").[6] The reason that this thesis allies Morris

with thinkers, poets, and artists that came after him, instead of before, is the thoroughly

modern belief held by Morris, Lee, Sontag, Merleau-Ponty, and other modernists and

postmodernists that there is some aspect of modern life that particularly blocks us from

that physical experience, that sensuous moment, described by St. Augustine. Sontag

writes

> Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for
> granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for
> granted, now. Think of the sheer multiplication of works of art
> available to every one of us, superadded to the conflicting tastes
> and odors and sights of the urban environment that bombard our
> senses. Our is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the
> result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All
> the conditions of modern life—its material plenitude, its sheer
> crowdedness—conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in
> the light of our senses, our capacities (rather than those of another
> age), that the task of the critic must be assessed.
>
> What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to
> *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more.[7]

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[6] "The Land," *Aperture* 77 (1976): 67.; Brendan Prendeville, "Merleau-Ponty, Realism and Painting: psychophysical space and the space of exchange," *Art History* 22 (1999): 373.
[7] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, by Susan Sontag (New York: Picador, 1961), 13-14.

Unlike Peterson, Boos, and Skoblow, who, although they, especially Skoblow, account for the sensation of physical experience in their writing, interpret Morris and the Kelmscott, this thesis makes an attempt at highlighting the loss of our senses and finding some way to recover them, in Morris, in the Kelmscott, in the world. Unlike Peterson, Boos, and Skoblow, who, although less than most scholars and critics, take "the sensory experience…for granted," this thesis attempts to provide both a record and an example of that sensory experience, in the written word rather than the physical object, that Morris, Lee, Sontag, Merleau-Ponty, and other seek.

To attempt to do this, this thesis must stand somewhere between traditional scholarship and something else more similar to the experience of experiencing a Kelmscott book; something both more vague and more direct, more poetic. To attempt to bring about the experience of interacting with a Kelmscott book through purely scholarly language, through purely description (if there is such a thing), is, in my opinion, impossible, but to both describe the experience and attempt to evoke the same experience through poetical flourishes is perhaps the closest that the written word can come to the experience of the physical, unexplainable. That is why this thesis views Morris and the Kelmscott not only through the lens of the various scholars consistently listed above (who are already rather poetic for scholars), but also through the lens of 'being' described poetically by Virginia Woolf and Phil Elverum, among many others. I refer here to passages like

> "In a world which contains the present moment," said Neville,
> "why discriminate? Nothing should be named lest by so doing we
> change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant,
> steeped in pleasure. The sun is hot. I see the river. I see tress

> specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past,
> through the red, through the green,"

or

> Standing against a tree in the forest I was thick in thought about all
> my questions and for a moment it all dissolved and the crispness of
> the open forest surrounded me. I could all of a sudden feel all of
> the subtleties of my body, like how my shoulder was pressing
> against a branch, my ear on the other side was a little numb, etc. I
> could see 360° around for a second.[8]

To return to Morris, in following Pevsner's idea of Morris as "one of the 'pioneers of modern design'," is not to say that the endeavor attempted by Morris at the Kelmscott is not through, from, about the mediaeval, but that the mediaeval is simply, for Morris, a conduit, a path towards transcendent physical experience of the world. It is not the mediaeval that Morris is most concerned with, but the modern world, because as he says…

The Mediaeval Past and the Book as a Path Towards a New Future

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[8] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), 81.; Phil Elverum, *Dawn: Winter Journal* (Oakland: Buenaventura Press, 2008), 22.

"Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization," William Morris famously said.[9] In the books that he produced at the Kelmscott Press with the help of his friend Edward Burne-Jones, we see Morris synthesize those two foremost desires of his, the production of beautiful objects and hatred of modernity, which he abnegates through his production of compelling physical objects. An important thing to note here is that Morris's hatred of modern civilization was not a hatred of the modern world. Instead, Morris's Gothic sensibilities, portrayed by some as a yearning for a fantastical, imaginary mediaeval utopia, are a way for him to renew and improve art, in this case the art of book production, by going back to what he believed was the best quality art ever produced: art produced before capitalism infected creation, and efficiency and cost-effectiveness became more important than quality and durability. However, renewing art through a focus on quality and durability, was not the end goal for Morris. He wished further to produce objects that, through their quality and durability, display their object-ness, forcing upon those that interact with them their own physical existence in the world. This stress on the immediacy of experience was a direct challenge to the object as being a commodity, delaying material interaction with the object, now the commodity, until a later moment when a better commodity could be had, and ever on, never letting the consumer stop and stare directly at the world. As the object was usurped by its place within the economic system, it became less an object in and of itself and more a valuated stand-in for the experience with that object; a simulated experience creating a barrier between the consumer and the world.

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[9] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 241.

To understand how Morris and the books that he produced at the Kelmscott Press challenge normative commodified vision let us first examine Morris's desire to use the book as a path to a better future. As Peterson writes, "One cannot understand the moral intensity of Morris's typographical writings without realizing that he does not merely wish to improve the printing of books: in fact (as was true throughout his career) he wants to alter the course of Western history."[10] The late Victorian England that Morris lived in was not, for Morris and many of his contemporaries, a place of beauty, a place that enriched the fabric of being. In 1890, Morris published an essay that described an average English industrial town of the time and the horror that lay in that modern urban environment. In the essay, he calls the reader's attention to "the dreary terraced houses, the small, shabby shops, the 'ugly modern iron bridge', the depressed and underfed workers in the streets, the wilderness of dirty brick and stone."[11]

For Morris, the visual was the most direct way that we experience the world, and the immediate perceptions gained from the visual inform more than anything else how we understand that experience. This is not to say that Morris only found the visual important, and in fact, as we will see, physical sensation is the most direct goal of Morris's project, but to stress that the visual is the most direct way we, or perhaps the first way that we come to, perceive the world. The philosopher Merleau-Ponty notes that "the world is around me, not in front of me."[12] A "world…around me" points to a physical experience of the world, instead of a visual, but it also implies that this physical perception of being *in* the world must be prefaced by vision, by what is "in front of me."

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[10] William S. Peterson, "Introduction," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), xxiii.
[11] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 5.
[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, edited by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 130.

Vision is given such great importance in a phenomenological model, because it is through vision that the body has the most diverse and distinct of experiences. We can see the importance of his visual perceptions in the descriptive language Morris uses to describe the industrial town and in how he designed and made his books. We also see the connection of the visual, and physical, world around Morris and the moral and social consequences that he found in that world as an avowed Socialist. In a sense, although a reductive metaphor when describing literature, the importance of the world surrounding us in our experience of the world made it so that for Morris, the cover (something that is experienced first visually and then physically) that is the external world did describe the book that is the modern world.

Writing on the supposed failure of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, an organization he had helped found, Morris wrote, "Now that I am grown old and see that nothing is to be done, I half wish that I had not been born with a sense of romance and beauty in this accursed age."[13] Writing these lines at the end of his life, although Morris might have believed he failed, at least in his own lifespan, he was still trying to find some way to succeed in his work on the Kelmscott Press that continued until his death, even working on Kelmscott ornaments while on his deathbed.[14] But more importantly, from this musing, we see the connection for Morris of "romance and beauty" to something that is palpably manifested in the world, in this case, ancient buildings, something surprising after Morris's spurning of the late Victorian world that surrounded him. Some may see this affection as just another way that Morris buried his head in the mediaeval sand so he would not have to interact with the modern world. Yet, Morris was

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[13] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 42.
[14] Ibid, 260.

interacting with, and trying to change, the modern world (using the mediaeval as a model, of course). We must then examine why and how he 'used' the mediaeval, and his idealized, dreamlike understanding of the mediaeval at that, as a means to affect the present. To explore this point, we first need to understand Morris's connection to the mediaeval, as in what specific components of mediaeval art and literature were of most interest to him, what effect these components had on him, and, also, how this connection manifests itself in his art.

Morris was first drawn to the Gothic as a child. As Peterson notes, "The most intense experience of these years seems to have been a rapturous glimpse of Canterbury Cathedral at the age of eight…at Oxford he was intoxicated by 'a vision of grey-roofed houses and a long winding street, and the sound of many bells'."[15] Further, while at Oxford with Morris, when the two were, seemingly, tied at the hip, Burne-Jones wrote an account of a winter walk across Oxford's Port Meadow from the ruins of Godstowe, during which he had a vision of:

> the old days, the abbey, and long processions of the faithful,
> banners of the cross, copes and crosiers, gay knights and ladies by
> the river bank, hawking-parties and all the pageantry of the golden
> age – it made me feel so wild and mad I had to throw stones into
> the water to break the dream. I never remember having such an
> unutterable ecstasy, it was quite painful with intensity, as if my
> forehead would burst.[16]

From these accounts, we can grasp that throughout their youth and into adulthood, both Morris and Burne-Jones were deeply invested and interested, "intoxicated," in the mediaeval world. This interest in and 'use' of the mediaeval continued throughout their

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[15] Ibid., 42.
[16] Ibid.

lives, most clearly as a way to get away from their own Victorian world, as an escape to some wisp of a dream of an imagined, mediaeval utopia.

In both Morris's and Burne-Jones's visions, however, we are greeted not with things that are foreign to the world, but instead by glimpses of the world, glimpses grounded in *vision*. For Morris, it is a "rapturous glimpse" at a cathedral and a town, a glimpse at an idealized version of the "wilderness of dirty brick and stone" that Morris would later criticize.[17] Although having the airs of the mediaeval about them, Morris's visions are grounded in the world he lived in. For Burne-Jones, though his vision is much more of the mediaeval, it is a glimpse grounded in the visual-physical with an "abbey…banners…copes and crosiers," as well as people. Regardless of the content of either Morris's or Burne-Jones's visions, they were capable of summoning maddening rapture, "unutterable ecstasy," and intense physical pain. It was in their ability to instantly, and fleetingly, engage the senses that the visions seem to be most important to the two artists. This fleeting, intense engagement with the unseen world of their visions then prompted further engagement with the physical, material world, after the momentary sensory overload, as a kind of searching for sensuous feeling, a visual, tactile plea for further engagement of the senses.

As Jeffrey Skoblow notes, "Kelmscott fundamentally committed to a program of synesthesia, a kind of derangement of the senses (which held a powerful charm at the turn of the last century—not to mention again Blake at the turn of the previous one) as emblem of and resistance to sensory alienation."[18] Both Morris and Burne-Jones attempted to increase engagement with the material world, through a "program of

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[17] Ibid.; Ibid., 5.
[18] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 247.

synesthesia," not only in their own lives, but also for others in their making, by including

motifs of the mediaeval in the objects that they made. While this at first seems to be

circular logic, it makes sense when considering that for Morris and Burne-Jones, the most

intense, sensuous feelings they got when they were *in* the world was in their interactions

with the mediaeval.

Though they may have had other visions or other sources that invited sensory

ecstasy, the visions, the sensory ecstasy, that we are left as a record only conflates the

mediaeval and the physical, bodily feeling of being *in* the world. Though it could be true

that records of other moments of being *in* the world were lost or never recorded, this

seems rather unlikely considering both the amount of correspondence, writings, lectures,

and interviews we have from Morris and Burne-Jones and the fact that for both the 'use'

of the mediaeval was an almost constant throughout their lives as makers. We can then

conclude that for both men, their most "rapturous glimpse[s]" of the world were tied to

the mediaeval. This conflation of the mediaeval and intense bodily awareness of the

world is even further demonstrated in a piece of advice in an 1893 letter from Morris to

C.M. Gere:

> You should now try to steep yourself, so to say, in mediaeval
> design…But (there is always a but, you know) all this will be of no
> use to you unless you feel yourself drawn in that direction and are
> really enthusiastic about the old work. When I was a young-bear, I
> think I really succeeded in ignoring modern life altogether. And it
> was of great service to me.[19]

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[19] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 43-45.

 Although rebuking this "doubtful advice" in a later letter to Gere, the "doubtful advice" adds even further nuance to the escapist/modernist dialogue surrounding Morris.[20] Rather than an escape into the past, "ignoring modern life" implies that, for Morris, the past had come to be present in today. In both "ignoring modern life" and steeping himself in the mediaeval, Morris would have to ignore modern interpretations of the mediaeval. In doing this, he would be experiencing mediaeval objects again as they were first experienced, without the historical and conceptual baggage that veils them, but as actual, physical objects.

Morris did not only use the mediaeval because the moments of most being *in* the world that both Burne-Jones and he experienced are tied to the mediaeval, but also because he believed that the 'use' of the mediaeval in his work could increase interaction with the physical world for the general population of Victorian England that included his readers/viewers; that his use of the mediaeval could lead others to ignore modern life as he had. Morris writes that "the academical art which has developed from that misreading of history which we call the Renaissance, will prove a barren stem."[21] Morris's association of the Renaissance, and the art made after and "developed" from the Renaissance (which for Morris includes nearly everything), with "academical art" suggests that the art made in and since the Renaissance is grounded not in the physical body but in the abstract intellect; that the art made in and since the Renaissance fails in that it shrouds the object in a theoretical or conceptual framework. The association further implies that the art made in and since the Renaissance is grounded not in the many people but in the few in the modern world able to define art; the association is a critique

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[20] Ibid., 45.
[21] Ibid., 43.

of the power structures and audience that govern and view art, respectively. All of these

implications put forth by Morris's statement suggest that art made in and since the

Renaissance is separate from the world. This point is even further implied by comparison

of the "academical art" since the Renaissance to a "barren stem." The use of this

physical metaphor not only grounds the critique in the world, but it also further

implicates "academical art" as lacking something in connection of the world in its

barrenness, in its lack of life and physical presence in the world. This discussion of art

made in the Renaissance, and since, and our knowledge of Morris leads us to believe that

there is some alternative, some 'flowering' art, that is grounded in the many people, in

the physical materiality of the world, and not in the academical intellect, and that this art

is the art made in the Middle Ages. Then, at least according to Morris, mediaeval art and

art 'using' the mediaeval has universal qualities not present in the "academical" art made

since then that helps to incite in the viewer a more profound appreciation of the material

world. For Morris, the Mediaeval was the last time that people and objects had an

unalienated, a direct, relationship with each other.

If mediaeval art necessarily offers viewers a more physically grounded way of

seeing rather than an academical one, why does Morris not simply directly copy the

multitude of fifteenth century models that he collected before starting the Kelmscott

Press? The answer lies in the fact that Morris was making his art not as an antiquarian

gesture but for the time that he lived in. Skoblow observes that "the Kelmscott Press is

distinguished from its Renaissance models in that it cannot make the Renaissance

assumption that reading is a sensuous act, and must assert as a claim what was formerly

taken for granted."[22] Note that by "Renaissance models," Skoblow means that even the earliest printed books were made in the Fifteenth Century and are thus of the Renaissance chronologically, although Morris asserts that these early printed books stylistically and spiritually show the last, dying breaths of the mediaeval.[23] With only the gasping breaths of the mediaeval to work with and the knowledge that although those fifteenth-century models he has are perhaps more grounded in their material existence than any of the art or books made since, his fifteenth century books certainly do not proclaim their physical existence in the world as the books he would create at the Kelmscott Press would. If Morris's aim was to increase physical interaction with the world, through sight and touch, he would have to exclude certain things and pronounce certain things from his models, as well as introducing new things not found in those models. For Morris, the mediaeval was simply the last historical point at which people and objects had an unalienated relationship with each other, and as he notes, "it seems a pity that we should make our starting point for a possible new departure at any period worse than the best."[24] In the rest of this study, we will examine in depth what Morris excluded, pronounced and added, and the reasons for and effects of these changes.

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[22] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 256.
[23] William Morris, "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 18; William Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 25.; William Morris, "On the Artistic Qualities of the Woodcut Books of Ulm and Augsburg in the Fifteenth Century," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 45.
[24] William Morris, "The Ideal Book," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 69.

From Art Object to *Thing*

I. The Book as Art Object

First, let us examine how Morris proposed books be treated and why he proposed

for them to be treated this way. More specifically, let us examine how Morris planned on

increasing engagement with the physical world, not only for himself but for the general

populace of modernity, through the book? In his own words:

> If I were asked to say what is at once the most important
> production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should
> answer, A beautiful House; and if I were further asked to name the
> production next in importance and the thing next to be longed for, I
> should answer, A beautiful Book. To enjoy good houses and good
> books in self-respect and decent comfort, seems to me to be the
> pleasurable end towards which all societies of human beings ought
> now to struggle.[25]

Despite his belief that book were secondary to houses in terms of increasing material

enjoyment of the world, he chose to make books and not buildings. This choice was not

simply related to skillset either, as Morris had, in fact, briefly trained as an architect in his

younger years. The reason for the choice of book and not building can be further

elucidated through a passage from the 1881 'The Prospects of Architecture in

Civilisation', in which Morris writes,

> I think you will most of you understand me but too well when I ask
> you to remember the pang of dismay that comes on us when we
> revisit some spot of the country which has been specially
> sympathetic to us in times past; which has refreshed us after toil, or
> soothed us after trouble; but where now as we turn the corner of
> the road or crown of the hill's brow we can see first the inevitable
> blue slate roof, and then the blotched mud-coloured stucco, or ill-
> built wall of ill-made bricks of the new buildings…pretentious
> little gardens, and cast-iron horrors of railings and miseries of
> squalid outhouses breaking through the sweet meadows of
> abundant hedgerows of our old quiet hamlet.[26]

The major thing lost in new architecture is not based in quality or style (though these

concepts play into it), but in the sympathy of the outside world to the person moving

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[25] Morris, "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," 1.

[26] Chris Miele, "Morris and Conservation," in *From William Morris: Building Conservation and the Arts and Crafts Cult of Authenticity, 1877-1939*, ed. Chris Miele (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 60.

through it. As Chris Miele points out, "Ancient buildings have a 'life and soul' not merely 'bodies'."[27] This loss of 'life and soul' in the buildings surrounding the individual then leads not only to buildings being "merely 'bodies'," but also to a loss of life and soul in the individual; as our surroundings become bodies devoid of life and soul, what can we do but follow suit?

Now, let us extend Morris's ideas about buildings to books. As Morris bemoans the loss of "sympathetic" buildings, he is at the same time recording what replaces them. "Sympathetic" buildings were present in any "spot of the country," but now when visiting that "spot of the country…we can see first the inevitable…and then…" The loss of life and soul in buildings is also tied up in a loss of place. What at first could only be described as "sympathetic", almost growing up out of the landscape, is replaced everywhere by things Morris can describe more concretely, by things placed on top of the world, rather than growing out from it. In Victorian England, this loss of place was happening at a rapid pace, especially with the introduction and growth of the railroad lines. Despite resisting this loss, Morris realized that it was happening, and he himself noted that until there is wholesale resistance to the current consumptive capitalist system, anything produced must be bound to that system.[28] The loss of place thus becomes inevitable if objects with a life and soul (but not place), *things*, are not re-introduced into the system. In the system that was Victorian England, the book becomes the ideal object for Morris to imbue with *thing*-ness, as Morris knew that books both had ancient precedents full of life and soul, and were inevitably tied to the railroad, to a lack of place-ness (especially with the introduction of book stalls at railroad stations and the new

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 200.

ability to comfortably be both in motion and reading, within the confines of a train car).

Especially since, as Morris noted in an 1893 lecture on the 'Ideal Book', "a book quite

un-ornamented can look actually and positively beautiful, and not merely un-ugly, if it

be, so to say, architecturally good, which, by the by, need not add much to its price."[29] In

effect, any book printed can be made so that it speaks to its own material existence.

How, then, would the books that Morris produced at the Kelmscott Press be

imbued with such power as to compel the reader of them to see them not as immaterial

literary makeshifts, to be consumed and then thrown away, with the assurance that if the

contained knowledge was ever needed again, it could be had both easily and cheaply at

the nearest market in these days of industrialist capitalist abundance, but to see them as

things? How could the book make interaction with an object go from a model based in

dematerializing alienation through making the object into a commodity to a model based

in direct, physical interaction with the object? And how would these *things* proclaim

their material existence, acting as mediators towards an *actual* experience with the world,

something deeper than how we smoothly pass through the everyday? Here, I use *things*

instead of objects, because of the implication that *things* simply exist, surrounding us as

we surround them, while 'objects' insists upon a much more typical relationship with the

things surrounding us, which implies that we are forcing upon these things our own

objectifying consciousness, cutting ourselves off from the world by seeing our

relationship with things as only one-sided. The differing interaction with a *thing* rather

than an object is effectively described by the painter and philosopher Lee Ufan, who

writes,

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[29] Morris, "The Ideal Book," 67.

> Indeed, those who see them see no object. Rather, what they see is non-objective space, a state of the world, the vivid existence of the world. That is to say, what is there is not a self-sufficient object, but an open structure of perception that also encompasses those who see it. The world is seen but no object is seen therein.[30]

Through the *thing*, one can see the world, unencumbered by any interpretative models, and directly engage with it.

Anyways, we, especially as students and scholars, are surrounded in our everyday lives by perhaps more books than ever before in the history of humanity and yet that malaise, that Marxist alienation, so unique (perhaps) to modern, industrial life still resides in our beating hearts. Unlike most other books however, the books made at the Kelmscott Press attempt to rid their reader/viewers of that malaise. The Kelmscott books do this first through their treatment as neither books nor makeshifts, but as works of art, insisting to the reader/viewer the need to look, to see, to attempt to grasp at something that cannot be expressed in words or everyday life. It is then, through their treatment as art objects, that they can reveal, through the reader/viewer's looking, their own material existence as *things* due to the distinct characteristics of a Kelmscott Press book.

Let us now examine how the books made at the Kelmscott Press become not only books, as they are usually treated, but also works of art. "Works of art" implies objects inherently separate from the everyday world, alienated objects swathed in conceptual frameworks, something that seemingly opposes Morris's project to create these direct, physical *things*. While this aspect is true, the books had to work within the world for which they were made. For their fitness to the expectations of Morris's customers,

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[30] Lee Ufan, "Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo (1970-1971)," trans. Reiko Tomii, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (2013): 243.

buying a commodified art object, Kelmscott *things* had to work within this initial

framework of the art object, a framework the physicality of a Kelmscott book breaks

through as it professes itself as *thing* (a process that will be detailed for most of the

remainder of this study). Emery Walker, the printer behind the Doves Press, and who

was also instrumental in the formation of the Kelmscott Press, said in 1930 that "Morris

showed how a printed book might be on its own plane a work of art."[31] In the next two

chapters, we will have an in-depth look at the exact qualities that make a Kelmscott Press

book differ from the commercially printed Victorian book. However, for now let us

focus only on how the Kelmscott Press books invited looking as one looks at art objects.

In an 1896 essay titled *A Note By William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott*

Press (the last publication of the Kelmscott Press), Morris says, "It was the essence of my

undertaking to produce books which it would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of

printings and arrangement of type."[32] From this we can gain that the most important

parts of the Kelmscott Press books in regards to how they insist upon being seen, rather,

that is, than being read, is in how they are printed and how the words are arranged on the

page.

Although nearly every page created at the Kelmscott Press is different, the

characteristic shared by nearly all of them, even the text pages, is a crowding of so many

different elements into a single page. The effect of this composition is that instead of the

normal way that one interacts with a book, with the words seemingly only pushing one's

eyes ever forward, the reader/viewer is halted in their tracks by the denseness of the

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[31] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 275.

[32] William Morris, "A Note by William Morris on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1.

Kelmscott page. This effect is only further emphasized, when the viewer is finally able to peer into the denseness and notice the different elements therein, by the ornamentalized letters, floral ornaments, and bedecked capitals. On top of this is the fact that many of the books produced at the Kelmscott Press include illustrations, further halting the viewer's eye and leading them to look instead of read. Skoblow describes the effect well in regards to the *Kelmscott Chaucer*:

> The eye is led here not so much from left to right and top to bottom as in
> every direction at once, and not so much led as slowly pulled: the effect is
> rather like reading taffy—no reader is likely to proceed for long before
> being compelled into reverie (and beyond reading), absorbed in the more
> immediate and sensuous considerations of Morris's book art.[33]

I find the use of the word reverie misleading, for it implies a move away from the world and into one's thoughts, as in a daydream. I think that a much more fitting phrase is the 'transcendence of everyday life through a glimpse at material reality'.

Let us focus again on how the choices made in printing the Kelmscott Press books leads the reader/viewer to see them as art objects. Other than the treatment of the printing and arrangement of type, what is perhaps the most important clue to the reader/viewer to view the book as an art object instead of a literary vehicle is a simple piece of printing added on the last page of each Kelmscott volume. When the reader/viewer turns to the last page of many of the Kelmscott Press books, such as *The Wood Beyond the World*, they are greeted with the famed Kelmscott colophon,

> above which reads: 'Here ends the tale of the Wood beyond the World,
> made by William Morris, and printed by him at the Kelmscott Press,
> Upper Mall, Hammersmith. Finished the 30th day of May, 1894'—with
> 'made by' and 'printed by' standing in for 'written' by, so that one might

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[33] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 254.

imagine the work had no author at all. And below the colophon is a line: 'Sold by William Morris, at the Kelmscott Press'—the business of commerce literally a thing apart (which nevertheless gets the last word).[34]

This notion of the printer, the maker of the physical object, as just as important to the book the reader/viewer is about to read as the author signals to the reader/viewer that this is as much a thing to read as it is to look at. Further, the placing of a single name as maker of the object signals to the reader/viewer that not only is this book something that should be looked at as well as read, but that this object is an art object made by an artist, and William Morris, a famous one at that, intoning to the reader/viewer that looking in this case is not only suggested, but socially endorsed. Yet here the notion of a Kelmscott Press book being an art object, being a commodified object, begins to break down, as it will even further throughout this study, because of the simple splitting between object and commerce, even on the pages of the books.

II. The Book Becomes Thing

Successfully producing books at the Kelmscott Press that could be seen by the reader/viewer as art objects, why then is this extra step of the art object becoming a *thing* needed? And how were the books at the Kelmscott Press treated, so that through deep looking, as befits art objects, they could proclaim themselves as *things*? To make the art object into *thing* is once again tied up in Morris's burrowing into the mediaeval, and on his return to the surface bringing with him the tools gained from there to work towards a better future. The Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre describes the *thing*-ness appeal of past artworks in his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, 1961, 1981), writing, "We perceive them as art objects, whereas in fact this art was not something

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[34] Ibid.

external to the everyday or, as is supposed, high above it and trying in vain to enter it, but *a style of life*. What we perceive as theories and philosophies were in fact ways of everyday living."[35] Here, Lefebvre contends that we, in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) centuries, have something lacking from, or perhaps some kind of blockage in, our everyday lives resulting in our separation from art objects, and even further from all the things that surround us. He further claims that this separation from things, that Florence S. Boos classes as "the twentieth-century's fall from such prelapsarian grace," was not always so, and that in fact, in the times that produced part artworks, the material things that surrounded a person were not external to them but as much a part of them as they were part of the objects.[36]

Morris looks at the art of the past in very similar, though through seemingly less certain and 'modern', terms to Lefebvre when he writes that

> the earth which…for many ages grew in beauty as men grew in numbers and power, is now growing uglier day by day…[T]here was no effort or wonder about it when it [a Cotswold laborer's cottage] was built, though its beauty makes it strange now…That was the natural course of things…men could no otherwise when they built than give some gift of beauty to the world: but all is turned inside out now, and when men build they cannot but take away some gift of beauty, which Nature or their own forefathers have given to the world.[37]

Here, Morris does three things. First, he criticizes Victorian modernity and Victorian modernity's productions, asserting that in their production they "take away some gift of beauty," just as our eyes glide over the strip malls that once were cool, dark forests. This accusation is not only a criticism of the modern for the sake of criticizing the modern, or

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[35] Florence S. Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 65-67.
[36] Ibid., 66.
[37] Ibid.

a fetishism of the mediaeval (or nature, in the case of my metaphor). Instead, it is the very real criticism that the products of modernity, in their cheap, shoddy, slick design, lack material presence in the world and thus, through their creation, they only take away from the material wealth present in the world, present in ancient buildings for Morris and the forest for me. Second, Morris exalts the, presumably mediaeval, material productions of the past in naturally adding beauty, or in other words materiality, to the world. Although not inherently the same, beauty brings a materiality to the world in the visual focus it brings to the world. Simply, beauty brings the individual closer to the world, while ugliness, at the very least, repels or makes the individual ignore the world. Third, the juxtaposition of the first two things Morris promotes in this passage implies that through a study of the, presumably mediaeval, past and its material productions, one could take what they learned and create *things* in the present that would work towards a better future; they could divest objects of their commodity status, making them into *things*, and increasing material engagement with the world.

Robert Catterson-Smith, who helped translate Burne-Jones's drawings into the illustrations gracing the pages of the Kelmscott books, said of Morris: "He hated being asked questions which meant an effort at analysis. He appeared to be unable or unwilling to separate his feelings from anything he thought about. The beauty of the outside of things was enough for his mind, he did not wish to probe the unseen."[38] Although I am not sure of Catterson-Smith's belief that Morris "did not wish to probe the unseen," it is undoubtedly true that the "outside of things" was what was most important to Morris. As Morris said in an 1892 lecture on "Woodcuts of Gothic Books": "Not only is all its

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[38] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 122.

special art obviously and simply beautiful as ornament, but its ornament also is vivified

with forcible meaning, so that neither in one nor the other does the life ever flag, or the

sensuous pleasure of the eye ever lack."[39] This vesting of "forcible meaning" in the

visual ornament of the *thing* does two things. First, it grants the external, the visual,

supreme importance in finding "forcible meaning." Here, instead of "not wish[ing] to

probe the unseen," the visual becomes the key to the unseen. It is only through the

"sensuous pleasure of the eye" that a less objectified, more 'true' understanding of the

world can be gotten at. It is only by being *in* the world that we can *see* it; not by thinking

of, *about* the world. Second, the granting of supreme importance to the immediate

visual-physical being *in* the world, Morris implies that there is another way to be in the

world, i.e. being through consciousness, through the academical mind, which ties in with

the other important part of Catterson-Smith's description of Morris, his hate of analysis.

This dichotomy of analysis/"the outside of things" was to eventually, with the birth of

postmodernism and the publication of Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Against

Interpretation", gain incredible importance in academicism and culture, and, like Sontag,

Morris is urging the reader/viewer of Kelmscott Press books to stray away from language

as an interpretive device, and to instead reside more in the sensuous physical feelings of

the body, granted through the visual and the physical.[40] The main difference between

Sontag and Morris are in how they reached this point. Morris was perhaps more direct in

his creation of objects that proclaimed themselves as *things*, rather than in an essay, but

the major difference is that although Sontag of course wrote an essay, her argument is

much more grounded in the physical art objects as *things* (that became known as

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[39] Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 26.
[40] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, by Susan Sontag (New York: Picador, 1961).

minimalism) than Morris. In other words, they had different goals. Sontag asserted that we need not to interpret, because it is a damaging, and objectified, way of seeing art instead of *things*. For Morris, the goal was much further-reaching. It was not for art objects to be seen as *things*, but instead, that through the viewing of art objects that are *things*, the reader/viewer can come to see the world as a whole as they do a *thing*.

The key to how Morris attempted to do this lies in the fact that the productions of the Kelmscott Press are books, *things* that are both visual-physical and literary-imaginative. Of even further importance are the specific kinds of literature that became bound as *things* at the Kelmscott Press. Boos writes that the titles that Morris printed at the Kelmscott Press "clearly reflected his personal preference for poetry and medieval texts" and that "in none of the series' sixty-six volumes did he find any room for a 'realist' work."[41] From this, one can gather that the titles Morris printed at the Kelmscott were decidedly imaginative, fantastical; the literary equivalents of the visions that Morris and Burne-Jones experienced in their younger days.

The key to understanding how the mediaeval and mediaeval-esque literature that Morris printed at the Kelmscott Press factors into the book as *thing*, and further, how it showed the reader/viewer of the book how to see the world as *thing*, is once again contained in the mediaeval manuscripts and fifteenth century books that Morris collected, as well as how he understood the material and contents of those manuscripts and books, when he began designing books in the 1880s. One thing that comes up constantly throughout his lectures and essays on the book is the concept of the epical and the ornamental. In an 1895 lecture on "The Early Illustration of Printed Books" Morris

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[41] Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 69-70.

explains the two as such: "In the first place, there was the epic side, the telling of a story with the interest of incident; in the second place, there was the ornamental part, the sense of expression of the beautiful and fitness from the beautiful – a proportional point of view of the picture and the work in which it is set."[42] Although he originally uses both terms as ways of describing the design of a page, he also compares epical design to epical or ballad poetry in its effects and goals.[43] For this reason, I believe that we are able to conflate his ideas of epical design and epical or ballad poetry in his discussions of the Gothic. Here we will then look only at his ideas of the epical as related to the literary content of his collection of Gothic books and manuscripts, and postpone the discussion of ornament until later chapters. In his lecture on "The Early Illustration of Printed Books" Morris further describes the epic as being "always simple and true; relating facts and not roundabout effects."[44] In an unpublished essay titled "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages" he further describes the epical as "represent[ing] this story of the life of the World in pictures."[45] In the same essay he describes the process of creating the epical as transferring the experience of when "the artist *saw* the event" into representations "full of *life* [neither emphasis mine]."[46] All of this resulted in, as Morris describes it, "a sort of sensual feeling for ornament and storytelling which went together."[47]

We already know that the mediaeval manuscripts and books that Morris collected were used as a basis, a building block, for the books he designed at the Kelmscott Press.

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[42] William Morris, "The Early Illustration of Printed Books," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 20.
[43] Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 26.
[44] Morris, "The Early Illustration of Printed Books," 20.
[45] Morris, "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," 4.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Morris, "The Early Illustration of Printed Books," 20-22.

Then the question becomes how the epical was incorporated into the Kelmscott Press, and how it contributed to the book as *thing* and further, the *thing* as mediator towards a new mode of vision. The books printed at the Kelmscott Press were, importantly, mostly not epic in the traditional sense of epical or ballad poetry. They were instead mostly poetry and mediaeval texts. In Victorian England, for Morris and his contemporaries, the epic, that was in the mediaeval world epical or ballad poetry, becomes instead poetry and mediaeval texts. For Morris and his contemporaries, the texts that were the most "simple and true" were poetry and mediaeval texts. The reason for this was undoubtedly the literalness of the texts printed at the Kelmscott Press, uncorrupted, as Morris would assert that they were, by the academicism of later epochs, by the self-awareness of the 'best' works of later generations that limited 'full' enjoyment or understanding of a work only to those 'in-the-know', typically the educated urban elite.

However, the way that most of the texts printed at the Kelmscott Press strayed more towards literalism rather than self-awareness was through an updating of Morris's notion of "represent[ing] this story of the life of the World in pictures." Through a general focus in many of the texts on descriptions of people and the 'natural' world, the texts printed at the Kelmscott Press sought to descriptively enhance the reader/viewer's focus on the physical world at the same time that the reader/viewer was being drawn into *seeing* the world by the physical *thing* that they had in front of them. Skoblow describes the effect of the literary side of the Kelmscott Press as "like great, inexorably spreading, sluggish whirlpools—Morris is typically concerned to impede the forward motion of reading by means of hypnotically unwavering rhythm, densely textured archaism, and the foregone conclusions of largely recycled material," working in a similar vein to the

physical *thing* the literature is containing.[48] It is this constant moving and halting of the

mind, just as the *thing* causes the eye to constantly move and halt, that is most important

in helping the reader/viewer be *in* the world. In allowing neither the mind nor the eye to

ever rest, other than momentarily, the *thing* brings the reader/viewer *into* the world by

limiting their ability to consciously comprehend *it*. We will closely examine how the

thing does this in the following chapters.

For now, let us ask: why was the creation of *things* that brought the reader/viewer

into the world and offered an alternative mode of *seeing* an important objective for

Morris not only at the Kelmscott Press, but throughout his creative life? In his lecture on

"The Woodcuts of Gothic Books" he writes "Nowadays artists work essentially for

artists, and look on the ignorant layman with a contempt, which even the necessity of

earning a livelihood cannot force them wholly to disguise. In the times of art, they had

no one but artists to work for, since everyone was a potential artist."[49] From this we can

reach towards the final goals of Morris's lifelong aesthetic project. By "the times of art,"

Morris refers to the period of the Gothic. In this statement, he is then, once again, 'using'

the Gothic as a foil to realize and define the shortcomings of the present day, the

Victorian, and as a way out of those shortcomings. In defining those shortcomings, the

major difference comes in the separation of art and life. Morris asserts that during the

Gothic, art and life were one; everyone was an artist, in the sense that everyone could *see*

as artists, and thus fully experience the material realm of the world. However, in the

Victorian, Morris asserts that artists only appeal to other artists both because art has

become a language, that is art has been defined and thus stripped of its direct, non-

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[48] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 256.
[49] Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 26-27.

linguistic, connection to the senses, and because of "the ignorant layman" who does not understand the language that shrouds art. Allowing everyone to *see* as an artist, as an encounterer, as someone who fully experiences the world around them even if they are not an "artist" per se, is the goal of Morris's endeavor, not only for appreciation of the world in and of itself, though this is still the central element, but also as an alternative, perhaps even a solution, to the commodified eyes of the individual in consumptive capitalist society.

In an unpublished essay titled "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," Morris vividly and angrily describes the Victorian maltreatment of books that are the "utilitarian production[s] of makeshifts."[50] He mainly directs his anger neither at the people mistreating books nor at the producers of makeshifts, but instead at the society that has normalized such actions. By promoting, through his productions at the Kelmscott Press, a mode of vision that emphasizes visual-physical existence in the world, not only the world but also the material productions of the world are granted supreme importance. For someone subscribing to this mode of vision even the makeshifts that Morris so bemoans are granted a physical existence in the world, and thus, theoretically, a respect for that existence from the purveyors of this mode of vision. This mode of vision then is inherently anti-capitalist, or at least anti- of the far-reaching capitalism present in the Victorian age, and continuing until today, in that it proposes the revolutionary idea that pleasure, the primary purpose of exchange, can be gained not through the exchange of immaterial value, but through soaking in the material wealth of the universe. When a mode of vision, nay being, can offer an experience that typically

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[50] Morris, "Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages," 1.

costs money for free, and an experience undiminished by the substitution of the original experience for its immaterial commodified replacement as well, it is inherently damaging to the economic system that props up the exchange of money for that diminished experience.

While the social-political aims of Morris's project are important to the aims of the Kelmscott Press, one must remember that the most important thing is inherently the mode of vision that results from one being *in* the world. In John Ruskin's "The Nature of Gothic", which Morris called "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century" and which was reprinted at the Kelmscott Press with a forward by Morris, five principles of the Gothic were set out: "savageness," "changefullness," "naturalism," "rigidity," and "redundance."[51] Boos writes that the most characteristically Morris of all the principles is "redundance," which Ruskin defines partly as "a profound sympathy with the fullness and wealth of the material universe."[52] After reading "The Nature of Gothic" at Oxford, Ruskin's definition of "redundance" undoubtedly played a large part in the art that Morris would create for the rest of his life, including the Kelmscott Press, becoming a central idea around which the *things* he made were crafted.

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[51] Duncan Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1982), 13.; Florence S. Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 71.
[52] Ibid.

Material and the *Thing*

In the last chapter, we examined why Morris wanted the books produced at the Kelmscott Press to become *things* and how the concept of the mediaeval within the Victorian was key to the *thing*-ness of the books. In this chapter and the next, we will closely examine how the book was transformed from art object to *thing*, first through material and then through typographical design. To do this, we'll take a deep look at Morris's principles of the Ideal Book, as well as the early material constraints and choices of the Kelmscott Press that would factor into every book made by the press, in relation to general, commercial Victorian book printing. First, the general, commercial Victorian book will be used as a foil against Morris's ideals and the general, overarching constraints imposed by the choices made at the Kelmscott Press to further elucidate the *thing*-ness of a Kelmscott Press book. To make this study of the general, commercial Victorian book more bound in the objects that were Victorian books, we will use the opening of pages 58 and 59 from J.T. Blight's *A Week at the Land's End* (Truro, 1893) (fig. 1). Peterson, whose chapter 'The World of Victorian Printing' this chapter and the next will rely on heavily, writes that *A Week at the Land's End* is "a typical late-Victorian book."[53] Although *A Week at the Land's End*, as "a typical late-Victorian book," does have several of the characteristics that Morris was to set himself against, as a late-

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[53] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 18.

Victorian book it also bears the influences of various English typographical reformers,

Morris included, as "it is set in Old Style (a symptom of the growing disenchantment

with modern-face types) and has dull wood-engravings and curious ornamented initials

that owe something to the craze for 'artistic' printing during that decade [1890s]."[54] In

other words, as an individual object, *A Week at the Land's End* does not include

everything that Morris was opposed to in Victorian printing, but offers a good example of

the immaterial nature of the typical Victorian book, as well as, with its illustrations and

decorations, offering more than simply a page of text to be in dialogue with Morris's

ideas, for the sake of this study.

How, then, was Morris planning to imbue books that he would later physically

produce at the Kelmscott Press, with *thing*-ness, especially in the typographical climate

that Morris was working within: a climate that Brooke Crutchley, a former printer of the

University of Cambridge, in a short history of English printing, allotted as having "design

and production…[that] were generally of a lamentably low standard?"[55] The

characteristics that Morris was most focused on were both the materials that the book was

made of and the almost architectural placing of different typographical elements to

compose the pages, as well as the design of those various elements. In the material

realm, Morris was most focused on paper, bindings, and ink. Within typographical

design, Morris was most focused on typefaces, the placement of words, letters, and lines

on the page, margins, ornamentation (including illustration), and the merging of all these

elements into a unified design throughout the entire book.

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Brooke Crutchley, "Caxton and After–The Visual Impact of Printing," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 125 (1977): 79.

Let us first focus on the material realm of Morris's ideals. The major things that Morris wanted from the materials he used was a tactile texture, but in a more general sense he sought for all bookmakers to be more true to their materials. This tactile nature that Morris sought was, of course, tied up in his mission to turn his books into *things*. Books in the Victorian, with their increasing smoothness and shine as well as loss of weight and solidity, were increasingly becoming more and more visual-intellectual (rather than physical/visual-physical) affairs, and for this reason, Morris's ideals and the books produced at the Kelmscott Press were to mostly attempt to bring the reader/viewer *into* the world through a similar experience to the visual-intellectual, i.e. the visual-physical (that is visual sensation that has aspects of the physical within it), an experience that mostly rested on the design of pages rather than the materials those pages were produced with. Although the readers/viewers of Victorian books did not approach books as physical objects, at least not primarily, Morris realized that the physical was just as important in the process of the book becoming a *thing* as the visual-physical. The physical texture of the materials, rather than the visual-physical texture of the design, through their tactility directly attack and awaken the reader/viewer's senses. This direct line to the reader/viewer's senses is key to how and why both Morris's ideals and Kelmscott books work as *things*, because before the reader/viewer even begins to read they must touch the bindings and run their fingers over the pages, and during this pre-reading ritual so necessary to reading, the reader/viewer's senses are signaled through the tactility of these components that this is to be a sensuous rather than an intellectual affair.

I. Paper

Let us look at both the paper being used in the typical Victorian book and Morris's ideas about paper, as well as the paper he used at the Kelmscott Press, to understand how Morris proposed to make not only his books *things*, but to bring the sensuous nature of *thing*-ness (even just a little) into all books. In his overview of Victorian printing, Peterson writes that at the end of the eighteenth century, good white rags, the material paper is made from, were becoming more and more scarce.[56] To combat this, inferior rags and chemicals began to be introduced into paper fiber.[57] As the nineteenth century wore on, more and more chemicals were added and then in the second half of the nineteenth century rag substitutes came to be used, including mechanical woodpulp.[58] Peterson tells us that the use of all of these chemicals, inferior rags, and rag substitutes has made it so that "as a general rule (with naturally a few exceptions), the older a book, the more likely its paper is to be in good condition today; librarians around the world are overwhelmed by the prospect of the steady disintegration of nearly all books printed since the mid-nineteenth century."[59] This lack of durability is problematic to Morris in that it further etherealizes the book, whose pages can now crumble apart in your hands over the course of your lifetime, but the major problem Morris has with the paper used by the typical Victorian book is in its use of chemicals, which allowed inferior products to masquerade as much nicer paper. This masquerading was done "with fake

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[56] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 13.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 14.
[59] Ibid.

wire and chain lines (to suggest that they were handmade) and adulterants (to add weight and shininess)."[60]

Although, theoretically, cheaper, 'fine' paper was better for everyone, the alienation of the reader/viewer from the true nature of the material in their hands was problematic for Morris. In an 1893 essay on "Printing", Morris writes that "any improvement must be based on showing openly that the cheap article *is* cheap, *e.g.* the cheap paper should not sacrifice toughness and durability to a smooth and white surface."[61] Here, Morris does something that he does over and over when he is criticizing typical Victorian book paper, and that is to conflate expensive paper with smoothness, and bemoan cheap paper for making itself smooth. Although his discussions on paper are based within the framework of a truth to material, that truth seems always to be a certain roughness, a turn away from smoothness. Of course, smooth material is present in the world, but in feeling a smooth object (smooth paper), it is much easier for that combined perceptual unit of body and mind to not recognize it as a material object, especially in relation to objects (paper) with a more rough, tactile texture. It is almost as if the sensual-seeking tendrils of the body slide off the smooth as easily as the fingers. Morris's intonations for cheap paper showing itself as cheap then becomes less about a truth to material and more about more of the paper used in books having a rough, tactile quality to it. It once again comes back to more books becoming *things*. Despite seeming to imply that expensive paper would have that smoothness that cheap paper attempted at, Morris refutes this, excitedly exclaiming, later in the same essay, that "the fact must not

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[60] Ibid.
[61] William Morris, "Printing," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 65.

be blinked that machine-made paper cannot in the nature of things be made of so good a texture as that made by hand."[62]

In the early days of the Kelmscott Press, when Morris was trying to find a proper paper to use for the books that were to be printed at the Press, it was this texture, this tactility, that he was after. When Morris first went to the paper mill of Joseph Batchelor and Son, the paper mill that would henceforth make all of the paper used at the Kelmscott Press (as well as several of the other famed private presses that existed around the turn of the century), Morris brought with him either a fifteenth-century book or a Bolognese paper of 1493 as a sample of the kind of paper he wanted for the Kelmscott Press.[63] This "use" of the medieval now becomes, once again, less of a simple copying of the past and more of a finding of the necessary qualities needed in the mediaeval. When the books of the fifteenth-century lacked or included some quality that did less than assert the book as *thing*, Morris would add or take away, respectively, that quality. The important quality for him in the fifteenth-century book was this tactility that further emphasizes the book as *thing*. As Peterson writes, "Any photographic reproduction of a Kelmscott page invariably fails to convey the superb tactile quality of the original."[64] I would hold that this sentiment, that is the loss of tactility, also holds true for facsimiles made of Kelmscott books. Although photographic reproductions and facsimiles of the *things* printed at the Kelmscott Press were both probably not concerns that ever entered into Morris's mind, the importance of the original *thing* as it moves through time is further

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 95.; Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott* Chaucer, 17. The Bolognese paper that Robinson asserts Morris brought with him could be the paper in the fifteenth-century book that Peterson says Morris brought along, but in neither source is it made clear if these are one and the same.

[64] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 108.

emphasized by this emphasis on such a small part of the total book design, and a part that

has been forgotten in our modern, removed, analysis of *things*, that yet forms such an

integral part of what a Kelmscott book is.[65]

Despite the emphasis on paper, Morris also printed small runs of certain

Kelmscott books on vellum. Yet, "Morris and Walker agreed that they personally

preferred paper copies."[66] Why was this? Wouldn't the presence of incredibly smooth

and rough sides to each vellum produce the scintillating tactility and realization of the

material existence of the *thing* that Morris sought with his paper? Wouldn't the dazzling

contrast of dark black ink against the stark white of the vellum enhance the hypnotic

effects of Morris's designs? I believe that the reason that Morris preferred paper over

vellum for production at the Kelmscott Press was tied up in both the process of

production and the theory of the whole Kelmscott enterprise.

W.H. Bowden, the foreman at the Kelmscott Press as well as a master printer, left

a description of how vellum copies were produced at the Kelmscott Press, and his

description makes it seem as if difficulties with the vellum constantly arose, and that even

when they didn't, the process of printing on vellum required even more time and focus in

the already labor-intensive process of producing Kelmscott book.[67] The difficult process

of printing on vellum combined with the already expensive vellum resulted in books that

cost five or six times what the paper versions of the same books cost.[68] If Morris had

decided to use exclusively vellum at the Kelmscott Press, the slower production time as

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[65] This removed position of analysis is exemplified by this study, during which I never came into contact with an actual Kelmscott book, working only from various facsimiles and images divorced from their place within the scheme of the object. See the last chapter for further discussion on this topic.

[66] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 109.

[67] Ibid., 110-111.

[68] Ibid., 111.

well as the cost of the vellum books would have resulted in making the already expensive books printed at the Kelmscott Press into luxury items only financially available to the highest up in society, into the immaterial commodities that the Kelmscott Press was expressly repelling against. If Morris's aim truly was to bring a greater appreciation and realization of the world, through being *in* the world, through the *things* made at the Kelmscott Press, to a wider swath of the population, only making books available to such a small section of the population would go directly against these aims.

Further, vellum is not a material encountered much, even by wealthy book collectors. On the other hand, most people interact with paper every day. Through sensory interaction with the paper of a Kelmscott Press book or a book following the principles of Morris's Ideal Book, any paper, even kinds that directly oppose Morris's ideals, is vested with the ability to materially remind the senses of that past interaction with the paper of a *thing*, and instantly bring an individual back *into* the world. Even before interaction with other potential paper *things*, the body is already looking towards these future interactions, with A.C. Cotton describing the paper used at the Kelmscott Press as "firm and crisp to the touch like the paper of a Bank of England note."[69] Through the use of paper that emphasizes the *thing*-ness of books, the everyday world of the encounterer becomes full of potential *things*. The sensory feeling granted by the paper in books existing as *things* grants any of the paper objects surrounding the reader/viewer (encounterer/interacter) the ability to become *things*.

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[69] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer*, 17.

II. Ink

Like paper, the ink that began to be used in the eighteenth century differed from that of the previous centuries. At first, soap began to be added to the traditional ingredients to cut the ink as was necessary for the faster and faster rotary and cylinder presses being used throughout the nineteenth century.[70] This addition led to a thinner and thinner ink being used, producing pages always more and more grey.[71] On top of this, Morris complained that black English inks had an undertone of red, while American ones had a blue undertone.[72] Whatever the resulting color of the ink, it can be said that it was decidedly not black. This not-black ink can be seen on the pages of *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1). The lack of blackness was troublesome, because it only further etherealized the book. The grey inks being used make the pages the reader/viewer is looking at pass by with no notice that the pages exist *in* the world, whatever their design may be, compared to the more striking contrast of black against white, which makes the design of the book both more concrete and nearly impossible to ignore.

Despite seemingly the same loss of quality happening to ink as paper, Morris never mentions ink in any of his lectures or essays on the book. This omission may seem odd, but there are likely two main reasons for Morris's seeming lack of concern for ink. First, unlike paper, there is no ink that can impart any kind of rough texture to the page of a book. In this sense, ink cannot add directly to the physical enjoyment of the book. Second, the pages of a typical Victorian book could be made much blacker through typographical design changes, something Morris perhaps thought both more important

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[70] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 13, 111.
[71] Ibid., 111.
[72] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer*, 17.

and easier to convince the commercial typography industry of, rather than of their having

to buy new inks that they would not be able to use with their rotary and cylinder presses.

Essentially, there was no point in preaching for a change to thicker inks when they could

not and would not be used, and much more fundamental changes could be put into place

to make more books *things* much more cheaply.

Despite this, at the Kelmscott Press Morris insisted that thick, black ink made

using only the traditional materials, lampblack and linseed oil, be used.[73] Here, we once

again see Morris balancing himself on a thin tightrope between producing luxury

commodities and *things* more available to more people, somehow never falling. On the

one hand, despite using what was likely a more expensive, thicker ink, Morris bought the

ink from the German Gebrüder Jänecke who made it "in an enormous factory with smoke

billowing from a multitude of smokestacks," something that likely kept the cost lower,

but also undoubtedly went against Morris's arts-and-crafts ideals.[74] On the other hand,

the use of thicker ink necessitated the use of a hand press (as did the ornament applied to

the pages), making production at the Kelmscott Press extremely slow when compared to

its commercial counterparts, although the use of a hand press did allow for careful

inspection of each page immediately after it was made and was needed for the

sumptuousness of the designs regardless.[75]

The combined use of thick, black ink and a hand press was key to how ink helped

Kelmscott books become *things*. The ink made it so that the slowly changing,

repetitious, almost kaleidoscopic designs of Kelmscott pages were further emphasized

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[73] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 13.
[74] Ibid., 112.
[75] Ibid., 111.

within the contrast of the white pages and black ink. The darkness of the designs gracing the Kelmscott pages now made it nearly impossible for the reader/viewer to escape the swirling, dreamlike effect of the designs. Although Morris implied in his lectures and essays that only good design, and not dark ink, was needed for a dark page to attempt to the bring the reader/viewer *into* the world, Morris required the blackest possible pages in his own printing, calling for both good design and dark ink. The traditional recipes that Morris wanted his ink made from also made it so that the ink, as he said in a letter to Jänecke, "should be sound and lasting and free from any possibility of change or discolouration."[76] Just as with the paper Morris procured from Batchelor, a durability that would stand the tests of time was wanted, for if the books made at the Kelmscott Press were to become *things*, and *things* that continued being *things* as they moved through time, just as the fifteenth-century books that Morris owned were, they would need to try as hard as they could to withstand the ravages of time. As the material the books are made up of crumbles and the designs fade, the *thing*-ness of the book comes less and less from its material and design and more and more from the sheer amount of time it holds in those crumbling pages and fading designs. This movement of the *thing* through time is extremely similar to Ruskin's proposition "that the value of an historic building lies in its sheer age, the continuity of its material over time," but as historic buildings are torn down, or perhaps more frighteningly for Ruskin and Morris restored, this continuity of material over time must be found somewhere else.[77] At the Kelmscott Press, Morris proposed that it could be found in the book.

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[76] Ibid., 114.
[77] Miele, "Morris and Conservation," 34.

The use of a hand press to print the books at the Kelmscott Press also allowed the books to have a curious quality that is often lost on us today in our photographic reproductions and facsimiles and that is "the considerable depth to which the type is impressed into the paper."[78] This embossing of the type into the page took the tactility of the Kelmscott paper one step further. Now, not only did the sensuous texture of the paper have a chance to bring the reader/viewer (encounterer/interacter) *into* the world as their fingers glanced over the page, but so too did the small pockets of space that would open up under their fingers as they passed over the type. This tactile sensibility was a key part of the total design that was a Kelmscott Press book. Although Morris was accused by many of archaism for impressing the type into the page as he did, as Morris wrote in a note inserted into *The Golden Legend*: "In no case should the book be pressed, as that would destroy the 'impression' of the type and thus injure the appearance of the printing."[79] This caveat is an important point in that Morris opens up physical texture to be not only a physical experience, but also a visual-physical experience, in using the word "appearance". Texture becomes not only a physical experience, but through *seeing* both the physical texture of the paper, impressed type, and bindings, and the flat "texture" created by the designs, a potential experience is created that, while mediated by the visual, lies somewhere between and has characteristics of both the visual and the physical; the visual-physical. On top of this, as Peterson notes, "The deliberate removal of the type-impression by pressing would have been a dishonest act in his eyes, because it represents an attempt to give an artificial smoothness to a product by concealing the real

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[78] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 131.
[79] Ibid.

nature of its material."[80] As we saw with the paper, Morris's ideas of both truth to

material and texture are inevitably tied up in making books into *things*, so, seemingly,

whichever route creates more sumptuous texture is a truth to material.

On top of black, red and, occasionally, blue inks were also used at the Kelmscott

Press.[81] The blue was used so rarely that I feel it is not important to talk specifically

about it, especially as most of what is to be said about the red ink also holds true for the

blue ink, although to a lesser extent due to the greater similarity between black and blue,

as compared to black and red. The red was "employed extensively for titles and

shoulder-notes, though only rarely for initials."[82] The red ink was used so rarely for

initials since one of the major tenets of Morris's design principles was having a unified

design over both a single page and an entire book. If red initials were used only

sometimes they would ruin the unity of the entire book, and if they were used at all, they

would ruin the unity of the design of the single page. Morris himself seems to have

figured this out through experimentation, because later Kelmscott books, like the

Kelmscott Chaucer, did not include any red initials. Yet, red titles and shoulder-notes

grace nearly every text page made at the Kelmscott, leading one to assume that it is not

simply the color red, but the specific architectural place of the initial on the page

combined with its redness that led to problems. While initials are part of the main block

of text on a page, titles and shoulder-notes exist outside this main block. This separation

grants the titles and shoulder-notes a unique potential no other text in a Kelmscott book

has. The titles and shoulder-notes being only text and the color red, a color that contrasts

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[80] Ibid., 132.
[81] Ibid., 116.
[82] Ibid.

much less with white than black, especially the deep black used on Kelmscott pages, are not noticed when the reader/viewer first looks at a Kelmscott page. Instead, the eye is first lost in the dense mass of design that grows on each Kelmscott page, bringing the reader/viewer *into* the world. The red of the title or shoulder-note, a color that contrasts heavily with a black *and* white design, then is able to pull the reader/viewer out of that dense thicket of design and, continuing with the trajectory of their eye, outside of the book. The book is teaching the reader/viewer that that feeling of being *in* the world that they can get from a Kelmscott book can also be found outside its pages; it can be found anywhere in the external world (although certain places are much more conducive in this than others).

III. Bindings

Binding was one of the only parts of the bookmaking process for which Morris never found a suitable material structure to support his ideas. On top of this, he also never lectured or wrote on bindings, odd in that they are the first point of interaction with the book. Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, Morris's friend as well as a successful printer and binder in his own right at the Doves Press and Bindery, recorded that Morris once told him that "bookbinding should be rough."[83] This enchantment with roughness is probably the same one that Morris found in paper, but despite that, he still was unable to find a wholly suitable binding for the Kelmscott Press books, even with the advice of the master binder Cobden-Sanderson.

Instead of settling on the typical leather binding, since Morris believed the leather available in nineteenth-century England would not prove durable, Morris had his books

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[83] Ibid., 119.

commercially bound in a choice of either quarter-linen with blue-grey papers on boards or full vellum.[84] The cheaper option, the quarter-linen, was what Morris called "a satisfactory temporary binding," as he supposed his customers would re-bind the books in something more durable. While this notion that the books would be re-bound, and thus personalized, by his customers is in fitting with his project to make the book *thing*, Morris at this juncture completely disregards the realities of Victorian book ownership, as many book owners didn't realize that to re-bound a book was even a thing one could do and so they simply left the book as is (Walter Benjamin would later write in "Unpacking My Library", that "ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects," a relationship that, according to Ackbar Abbas, could transform "the experience of possession…into the possession of experience," and a certain intimacy could only make more tactile the sensuous relationship between the person and *thing* that resulted in that moment of both possessing and being possessed by experience).[85] Although the quarter-linen binding did not take away from the *thing*-ness present in other facets of Kelmscott books, it certainly did not add anything to the books, and the intangibility of the paper covered boards did not match the durability of nearly every other facet of a Kelmscott book.

The vellum binding, on the other hand, had problems of its own. Despite the binding having many qualities that would bring the reader/viewer (encounterer/interacter) *into* the world, such as its "simplicity and imperishable nature" as well as the fact that Morris's preference for limp vellum meant that the binding would wrinkle and curl with

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[84] Ibid., 120.

[85] Ackbar Abbas, "Walter Benjamin's Collector: The Fate of Modern Experience," in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne (New York: Routledge, 2005): 223.

age, a vellum binding was considerably more expensive than a quarter-linen one, and so the choice of binding for any but the wealthiest of customers would be the quarter-linen.[86] On top of this, despite the "imperishable nature" of vellum, it does harden with age and it is now "nearly impossible to open fully some of the Kelmscott volumes," preemptively creating a barrier in between the *thing* and the reader/viewer in that the main source of interaction, that is reading/viewing the pages of the book, is lost.[87] The option to choose from two bindings, one cheap and unsuitable and the other a luxury and having the qualities of a *thing*, limits the, exterior at least, *thing*-ness of the Kelmscott book in making the reader/viewer have to choose between a *thing* lacking a proper binding or a luxury object, and is perhaps the biggest failure of the entire Kelmscott project.

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[86] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 120.
[87] Ibid., 121.

Design and the *Thing*
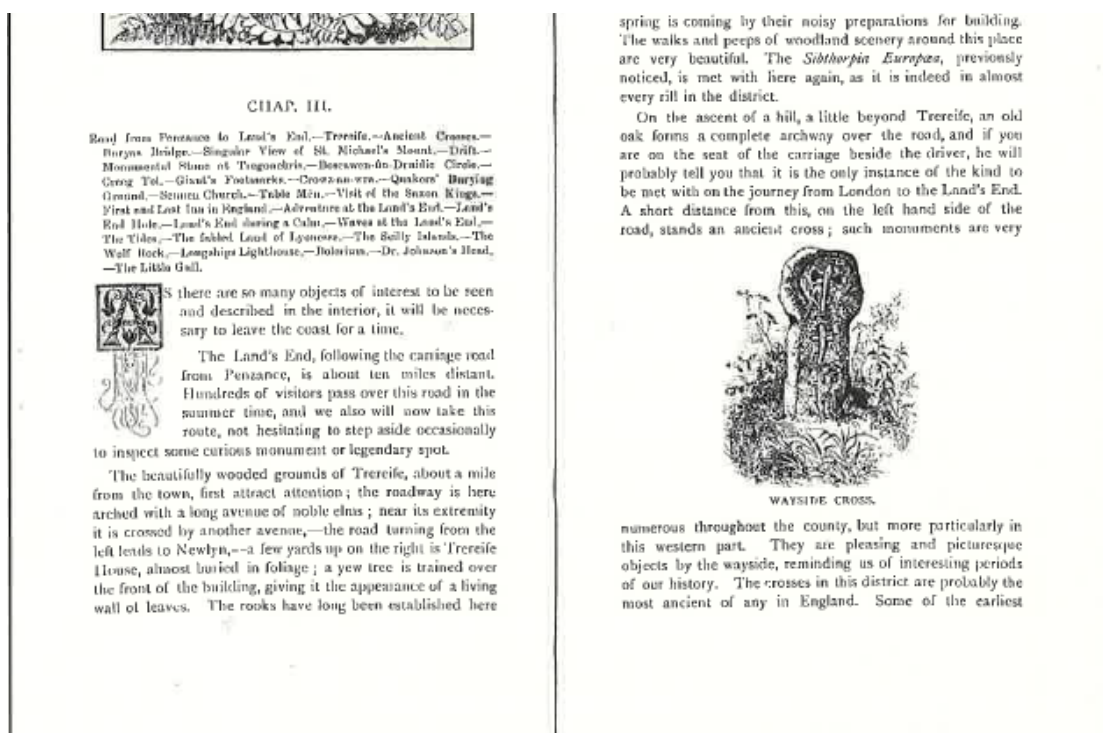
Figure 1. J.T. Blight, A Week at the Lands End (Truro, 1893), 58-59.

While material qualities were certainly key to attuning the reader/viewer's body to the fact that they were interacting with a *thing*, in that pre-visual moment of interaction, before the reader/viewer looks at the pages within the book, when interaction with the book is almost purely sensory, the reader/viewer is still approaching the book as

a book, a literary vehicle. Though the reader/viewer is, through the material qualities of the book, more attuned to be *in* the world, it is what resides on the pages of the book that transforms a potential *thing* to a *thing*. For this reason, the typographical design of the page is what interested Morris most in his lectures, essays, and time at the Kelmscott Press. On top of this, while the material constraints that Morris wanted from his own books were financially restrictive to many, and mostly inapplicable to the typical, commercial Victorian book, Morris's design principles could be quickly and cheaply applied and used, to some extent, by even the most penny-pinching of Victorian printers. This quick application of some of Morris's ideals can be seen in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1), although several of his principles are left behind and the ones that are applied, as we will see, seem to be done only halfheartedly.

When looking at the material ideals and construction of Kelmscott Press books, it was nearly always the physical nature of the materials that opened up being *in* the world to the reader/viewer. Yet, design has no physical nature. The ink the design is made of must constrain itself to the physical nature of the materials it is on. How, then, does design open up the reader/viewer to being *in* the world, and how does design come to be just as, if not more, important to bringing the reader/viewer *into* the world as the sensuous nature of materials for Morris? Unlike the mainly physical experience between the material and the reader/viewer, the design that Morris proclaims as good design is decidedly visual-physical. Although the ink itself lacks any discernable texture, the way the various parts of design (including typefaces, the placement of words, letters, and lines on the page, margins, and ornamentation, including illustration) individually, and more importantly together, create, for the eye, a semblance of physical texture is what brings

the reader/viewer *into* the world. In this chapter, we will examine how this visual

semblance of physical texture, that somehow visually scratches the same itch that

physical texture does, as key to how Morris both wants books to be designed and designs

books.

I. Unity of Design

Since Morris was most interested in illustrated books potential as *things*, it is the

illustrated book that he frequently comments on. Despite this, nearly all of his advice on

how to create an illustrated, or perhaps more correctly ornamented, book can also be

applied to the un-illustrated book if one simply ignores the portions on illustration.

Whether the book was to be illustrated or un-illustrated, the most important thing to

Morris was that all the different factors of design work together. In his lecture on the

"Woodcuts of Gothic Books", Morris writes

> An illustrated book, where the illustrations are more than mere
> illustrations of the printed text, should be a harmonious work of
> art. The type, the spacing of the type, the position of the pages of
> print on the paper, should be considered from the artistic point of
> view. The illustrations should not have a mere accidental
> connection with the other ornament and the type, but an essential
> and artistic connection. They should be designed as a part of the
> whole, so that they would seem obviously imperfect without their
> surroundings. The designs must be suitable to the material and
> method of reproduction, and not offer to the executant artist a mere
> thicket of unnatural difficulties, producing no result when finished,
> save the exhibition of a *tour de force*…This is the only possible
> way in which you can get beautiful books.[88]

Though it may be too much to expect that every book be "a *tour de force*," all the

underpinnings of Morris's design theory are here: that typographical decisions should

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[88] Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 40.

connect and unite the different parts of the book's design to form one total design and that specific decisions should be made according to the specific book being printed, instead of using a one-size-fits-all method or printing and designing different parts of the book separately.

Morris certainly wasn't the first to introduce such design theory, and although these principles may seem simple and obviously good for the book, there was a severe lack of them during the Victorian period. In *Typographia* (1825), a technical manual for printers, T.C. Hansard notes that "the system of hurrying works through the press, lately adopted by some booksellers, by giving them among a variety of houses, is destructive of uniformity…It is not unusual to discover, in volumes, so divided, one to contain more lines in a page than another, or, even if the number of lines are the same, the page differs in length; or, should the type agree in depth, it is very probable that it varies in thickness; and still more probable that is varies in the quantity of work it has done; – all of which produce a glaring want of that uniformity which constitutes the beauty of the typographic art."[89]

Although Morris was certainly against this kind of lack of uniformity in books, that caused by careless production, a lack of uniformity that could only spur those who mistreated these kind of makeshifts, he was also after something more nuanced. This subtler lack of uniformity can be found even in books printed in the 1890s that owed something to the trend towards "artistic" printing spurred on by typographical reformers, including Morris, such as *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1).[90] In *A Week at the Land's End*, which uses seemingly Morris approved Old Style type, wood-engravings, and

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[89] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 13.
[90] Ibid., 18.

ornamented initials, this lack of uniformity is in how the page almost sections itself off

into different parts and goes against everything that Morris preached for that would make

the book a *thing*. Just as Morris decided that using red ink for initials would not allow

the reader/viewer to "lose themselves" (*in* the book, the world) in the total design of a

Kelmscott page, the dull wood-engravings and ornamented initials of *A Week at the*

Land's End, being much darker than the type, force the reader/viewer to either read (or

look at) the type, or look at the woodcuts and initial. The contrast between the darker

woodcuts and the grey-ish type forces the reader/viewer to have to momentarily adjust

and transition their eye as it moves from the woodcut to the type and vice versa. Instead

of the ebb and flow of the eye as it moves about a Kelmscott page, the eye as it moves

over these two pages of *A Week at the Land's End* must constantly pause and jerk back

into movement. This pause and jerk motion of the eye never allows the eye to fully revel

in the design of the page and *see* the world.

The argument could be made that one could get lost *in* and get that experience of

the *thing* from only a part of the page, perhaps the woodcut of the "Wayside Cross".

However, this immersion is nearly impossible, because the white of the page that

surrounds the woodcut, in fact even breaking into the woodcut in the bottom right,

consistently destroys any attempt to do so as the eye is constantly broken out of potential

transcendence, through material reality, by the white of the page. Regardless, having to

attempt to be *in* the world goes directly against the goals of Morris's project at the

Kelmscott Press. That goal, which Morris elucidates as: "How shall we set about giving

people without traditions of art eyes with which to see works of art?", is lost if one is to

rely on the reader/viewer to seek something so irregular from a book.[91] This point

explains why, although it is certainly true that there can be book pages that are both well

designed and grey, Morris was a firm believer that "the general *solidity* of a page is much

to be sought for."[92] By this he meant that the portion of the page that is printed on should

form one solid block, one solid pattern; something that requires a dark, black page,

instead of a grey one. The darkness of the page is important, because not only is the eye,

at least momentarily, stuck in that dazzling pattern of black and white (of the paper) and

brought *into* the world, but the eye is also inexplicably drawn to that blackness when the

page is first seen. One must not have "traditions of art" to be drawn to the blackness of a

Kelmscott page. For this reason, this creation of a black, patterned page is key to

Morris's theories of book design, and something that will be one of the major motivators

in his decisions on the placement of words, letters, and lines on the page, margins,

typefaces, and ornamentation (including illustration).

II. Placement of Words, Letters, and Lines on the Page

Let us first focus on why Morris's quest for a page black was so focused on the

placement of words, letters, and lines on the page, and how using the placement of those

various things, he made the page darker. Peterson writes that

> there was a broad consensus – which was not to be seriously
> questioned until Morris and Emery Walker attacked it in the 1890s
> – that generous spaces between words and lines of type improved
> legibility. The combination of lighter typefaces and ample spaces
> produced a page in which the text appeared to be, at best,
> greyish.[93]

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[91] Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 67.
[92] Morris, "Printing," 64.
[93] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 20.

Even in the 1890s, in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1), this practice of generous spacing was still being carried on. In *A Week at the Land's End*, even if a dark, black ink similar to the ink Morris used at the Kelmscott Press was used, the spacing between each letter, word, and line would still leave the page looking grey due to the excess of white around each letter, word, and line of type. While Morris insisted that the reduction of white space would increase legibility, his work at Kelmscott tells a different story. While the books printed at the Kelmscott Press were certainly legible, it is less than natural to attempt to read them. As Skoblow explains, "If we note the legibility of Kelmscott at all, it is with a small shock of surprise, as if to say: oh look, it's legible too!—like a little surplus of virtue."[94]

Although Morris asserts his goal is only legibility and a page more desirable to look upon, an anecdote from when his *The House of the Wolfings* (fig. 2) was being printed, in 1899, at the Chiswick Press, the premier private press of Victorian England before the Kelmscott Press was started and which Morris had something of a brief apprenticeship at, tells a different story. Harry Buxton Forman, of the Chiswick Press, was surprised to see Morris add the second 'in' to the phrase "written in prose and in verse" on the title page, making the phrase longer and thus taking up more space on the page.[95] In a letter, Morris characteristically replied, "Ha! now what would you say if I told you that the verses on the title-page were written just to fill up the great white lower half? Well, that was what happened![96] Words, in this case an entire collection of verse, become not signs but material manifestations; material manifestations that become filled

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[94] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 247.
[95] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 67.
[96] Ibid.

with poetic meaning, more even than the verse itself. Poetry *in* this world, not some

other! Describing the Kelmscott books, Jerome McGann phrases it this way:

> The work forces us to attend to its immediate and iconic condition,
> as if the words were images or objects in themselves, as if they
> were *values* in themselves (rather than vehicles for delivering some
> further value or meaning)…It resists any processing that would
> simply treat it as a set of referential signs pointing beyond
> themselves to a semantic content. This text declares is radical self-
> identity.[97]

One way that Morris tried to get rid of white space is by ridding himself of nearly all

space between letters and words. Peterson writes that "Morris, in over-reacting to the

splotchiness of the usual Victorian printed page, sometimes huddled the words together

so tightly as to interfere with legibility."[98] While this is surely an exaggeration,

compared to the words in a book like *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1), Morris's words

are packed together quite tightly. This practice, combined with all of Morris's other

practices to get the page darker, was done in the pursuit of a deep textural mass on the

page that was simply not present on the barely-there pages of a typical Victorian book.

Stanley Morison, an influential English typographer of the early- to mid-twentieth

century, wrote that "typography is the efficient means to an essentially utilitarian and

only accidentally aesthetic end, for enjoyment of patterns is rarely the reader's chief

aim."[99] With his penchant for dark, textural (ensnaring both the physical and visual-

physical senses) pages, Morris proposed that although "enjoyment of patterns is rarely

the reader's chief aim," might those patterns be just as, if not more, important in social

and individual fulfillment, through occupation of a space *in* the world, as the attempted

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[97] Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 74-75.
[98] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 125.
[99] Ibid., 124.

utilitarian transition of meaning from one individual to another through typography.

A TALE OF THE HOUSE OF THE
WOLFINGS AND ALL THE KIND-
REDS OF THE MARK WRITTEN
IN PROSE AND IN VERSE
BY WILLIAM MORRIS.

WHILES IN THE EARLY WINTER EVE
WE PASS AMID THE GATHERING NIGHT
SOME HOMESTEAD THAT WE HAD TO LEAVE
YEARS PAST; AND SEE ITS CANDLES BRIGHT
SHINE IN THE ROOM BESIDE THE DOOR
WHERE WE WERE MERRY YEARS AGONE
BUT NOW MUST NEVER ENTER MORE,
AS STILL THE DARK ROAD DRIVES US ON.
E'EN SO THE WORLD OF MEN MAY TURN
AT EVEN OF SOME HURRIED DAY
AND SEE THE ANCIENT GLIMMER BURN
ACROSS THE WASTE THAT HATH NO WAY;
THEN WITH THAT FAINT LIGHT IN ITS EYES
A WHILE I BID IT LINGER NEAR
AND NURSE IN WAVERING MEMORIES
THE BITTER-SWEET OF DAYS THAT WERE.

LONDON 1889: REEVES AND TURNER 196 STRAND.

Figure 2. William Morris, The House of the Wolfings (Chiswick, 1889).

Of course, none of Morris's work on reducing white from breaking into the block

of text would be of much consequence if he did not have a way of justifying his lines,

while also making sure of tight word spacing throughout the line, and making sure white

did not eat into the edges of that black block of text he so desired. One way that he did

this was by allowing for incorrect or altered spellings to be kept or added, respectively,

when the pages were being designed. Henry Halliday Sparling, a disciple of Morris who

would write the first history of the Kelmscott Press in 1924, wrote, "When we came to

the *Godefrey of Boloyne*, Morris decided that the original spelling need not be rigorously

adhered to, as Caxton was an erratic speller, following no discernible rule, and that we

were consequently free to retrench or add a letter where the justification of a line could be

improved or a 'river' avoided thereby."[100] Further, F.S. Ellis, an editor and proofreader

at the Kelmscott Press, wrote to Sydney Cockerell, the secretary of the Press, "I am

following the K.P. [edition of *The Defence of Guenevere*] but strange to say though dear

old Morris corrected that much as to punctuation – he has not only left the old misprints

of 1858 but perpetuated others [–] 'sleepby' for 'sleepy' &c &c."[101] Morris's free use of

spelling allowed him to have the tight black lines that he so desired while also making

sure the block of text stayed just that, a block.

This black block of text was even further emphasized by Morris's crusade against

leading in Victorian books. Peterson notes, "Nineteenth-century books are leaded far

more generously than most readers today would wish, but once again Morris went to the

opposite extreme by trying to abolish spaces between lines altogether, thus making some

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[100] Peterson, "Introduction," xxxii.
[101] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 125.

(though not all) of the Kelmscott volumes difficult to read."[102] We can find a case of this typical generous Victorian leading in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1). The white of the page not only breaks into the lines, but also comes between them, ridding the page of any possibility of forming a pattern for the reader/viewer. On the other hand, although Peterson's accusation of illegibility against the Kelmscott books is certainly hyperbole, it is also true that Morris limited as much of the negative space of the page as possible from being between the lines of Kelmscott pages, and this lack of negative space in the black blocks of a Kelmscott page was only further emphasized by the average Victorian being used to the splotchy white and grey pages of books like *A Week at the Land's End*.

With all of Morris's attempts to darken the page not fully satisfying him, he also decided to do away with paragraph separation. Instead of the typical method of separating paragraphs, still familiar to us today, at the Kelmscott Press the paragraphs would be jammed together with only one of the various small, stylized leaf ornaments Morris designed placed between them. Peterson explains that this decision "did, needless to say, shape the text into the black rectangle which Morris desired, but it also disfigured the page with measles-like spots and made impossible that uniformity of colour which he himself sought."[103] While Peterson is right in saying that using the leaf ornaments as paragraph breaks helped shape "the text into the black rectangle which Morris desired," he is certainly wrong in his characterization of the leaf ornaments as disfiguring the page. The leaf ornaments certainly become spots, measles-like if you so please, that draw the attention more than anything else when the reader/viewer first glimpses the text in a Kelmscott book. Instead of disfiguring the page, they draw the reader/viewer to the text

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[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 131.

with an eye more focused on viewing than reading. This initial liaison with a textural

ornament as threshold through which the text is encountered forces the block of text into

the position of ornament, rather than its usual position as vehicle for some meaning

outside of itself, for the reader/viewer, bringing them *into* the world. Further, Peterson is

wrong in accusing Morris of wanting a "uniformity of color" on the printed page.

Certainly, Morris wanted a black page, but instead of the white of the page being

subjugated to the black of the type, the darkness of a Kelmscott page only makes it so

that the white of the page can also become ornamental. It was not "uniformity of color"

that Morris so desired in the pages of a Kelmscott book, but a dark enough page so that

the interplay of black and white on the page could become as sensually enticing, as *thing*,

as the interplay of garnet and gold in the designs on the Sutton Hoo purse-lid.

III. Margins

Morris's aims to create a dark textured page at the Kelmscott Press for the

reader/viewer to lose themselves *in* is only to brought to further realization by his choices

regarding margins. The typical Victorian view on margins is exemplified by the skilled

American printer Theodore Low De Vinne's 1871 series of articles on "Book Margins",

in which he argues that "the text or printed page is the picture, and the margin is the

frame; all the properties require that the picture, when framed, shall be in the centre of the

frame."[104] This idea of framing the text, with deep rivers of white page surrounding the

text on all sides, can be seen quite clearly on the pages of *A Week at the Land's End* (fig.

1). Morris's rather brilliant solution to extend the texture of a single page across the two-

page opening of a book can be found in his essay on "Printing": "the page [would] so lay

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[104] Ibid., 20.

on the paper that there was more space allowed to the bottom and fore margin than to the top and back of the paper, thus the unit of the book being looked on as the two pages forming an opening" (fig. 3).[105] Here, Morris means that the bottom and exterior margins should be larger than the interior and upper ones, which allows, as he notes, the two-page opening of a book to form, in the closeness of the two blocks of text, due to the small interior margin, one single design, one single pattern. This move from being able to view one page to two pages as one allows the reader/viewer a larger space for the eye to hazily stumble through.
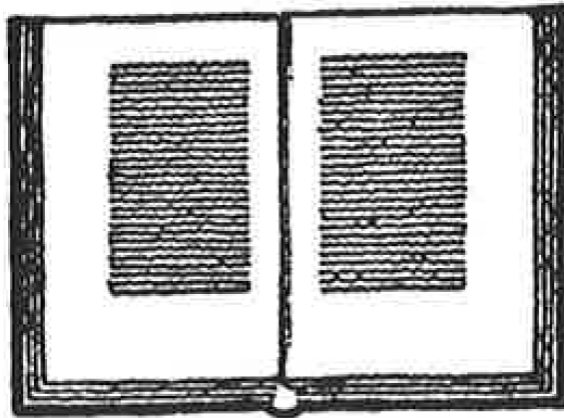

Figure 3. William Morris, Diagram from "Printing" (1893).

On top of this, the extremely large bottom and exterior margins that Morris's ideas insist upon do not exist simply as blank material. The large amount of white space on the bottom and exterior of the page further invite the viewer to touch the page, making the experience of the Kelmscott simultaneously both physical and visual-physical. The large white spaces that make up the bottom and exterior margins also allow a visual-transitional space for the reader/viewer as they transition from being *in* the world, through their physical and visual-physical experience with the two-page opening, to

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[105] Morris, "Printing," 64.

being outside the book and realizing their possibility of being *in* the world at any time,

Kelmscott book or not. This visual-transitional space is key. As the reader/viewer looks

away from the book, the sudden, and incredibly momentary, shift from the dense, textural

designs of a Kelmscott page to the emptiness of the white page and then immediately to

the decidedly not empty world imbues the world with the feeling of the *thing*. In the

allying of the experience of the dense, textural quality of the Kelmscott page with the

experience of the exterior world, through the juxtaposition of the emptiness of the white

page, the eye is taught how to see the world similarly to how it sees Kelmscott pages; the

eye is taught how to see the world texturally (in the visual-physical sense) and further,

how to be *in* the world.

IV. Typefaces

Although the spacing of various typographical elements and the margins of a

book were certainly key in helping Morris to make the page darker, as we have seen, he

was after not only a dark page, but also one that was fully ornamental. One of the key

elements used to achieve this ornamental affect was Morris's designing typefaces

specifically for the Kelmscott Press. In an 1894 essay titled "Some Notes on the

Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages", Morris exclaimed that the writing in mediaeval

Irish manuscripts is "positively beautiful in itself, thoroughly *ornamental*."[106] It was this

ornamental effect of the letter that Morris so desired, perhaps even above easily legible

text, and we will see that when we look to his designing of typefaces at the Kelmscott

Press. However, to fully understand how heavily ornamental Morris's letters would

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[106] William Morris, "Some Notes on the Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages," in *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 7.

appear to the contemporary reader/viewer, let us first look to the typical typefaces used in Victorian England.

The primary style of type used in nineteenth-century England was modern face, as compared to the Venetian and old face inspired types that Morris, and several other typographical reformers, would use. It is not necessary in this study to note everything that differs between a modern face type and a Venetian or old face type, but rather, only to focus on the differences that were exploited by Morris in the creation of his typefaces. The major elements of modern face type that Morris objected to were the large contrast between the thick and thin strokes of the letters, as well as the regular and non-individual character of the letters. The introduction of steam presses in the nineteenth-century required types to be cast in harder metals, which "led to the discovery that it was now possible to make the strokes and serifs of letters much finer."[107] This discovery only exacerbated the problems Morris had with modern face types. The high contrast between thick and thin strokes in modern face type simply made the letters, already made with thinner, grey ink, even greyer on the page. The greyness of the individual letter was further exacerbated by the non-individual letters of modern face type. Morris complained in "Printing" that "modern printers generally overdo the 'whites' in the spacing, a defect probably forced on them by the characterless quality of the letters."[108] De Vinne wrote that "from a reader's point of view, the general effect of the print was relatively mean and wiry, gray and feeble."[109]

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[107] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 19.
[108] Morris, "Printing," 64.
[109] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 19.

The wiry, grey, modern face type employed extensively in nineteenth-century England only made the problems Morris and others had with the design of the typical Victorian book page more problematic. The effect of the thin modern types employed by Victorian printers was so unpopular that in the last decades of the century, Old Style, a type much more influenced by Venetian and old face typefaces and which is used in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1), became "by some estimates, indeed, the most widely used book face in England."[110] Morris was still not satisfied however, remarking that "the design of the letters of this modern 'old style' leaves a good deal to be desired, and the whole effect is a little too grey, owing to the thinness of the letters."[111] To combat this still too grey effect, Morris would create two typefaces at the Kelmscott Press that had letters that were thick and "thoroughly individual in form, [so that] the words may be set much closer together," as well as being thoroughly ornamental, working less as letters and more as, in the words of McGann, values; values that further ornamentalize the page, helping to create pages that can *show* the reader/viewer a glimpse of the world.[112]

The first typeface that Morris designed was called the Golden type (fig. 4), after *The Golden Legend*, which was then envisioned as the first book that was to be printed at the Kelmscott Press. This type was a Roman style, a family of typefaces based off the letterforms originally employed by Roman stonecutters, best known to us today in the form of 'Times New Roman'. Morris based the Golden type off the types of the earliest Venetian printers, principally the type of Nicholas Jenson and a heavier version of the

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[110] Ibid., 26.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Morris, "Printing," 64.; McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*, 74-75.

Jenson type used in Jacobus Rubeus's 1476 edition of Aretino's *Historia Florentina*.[113]

Compared to the typefaces being used in
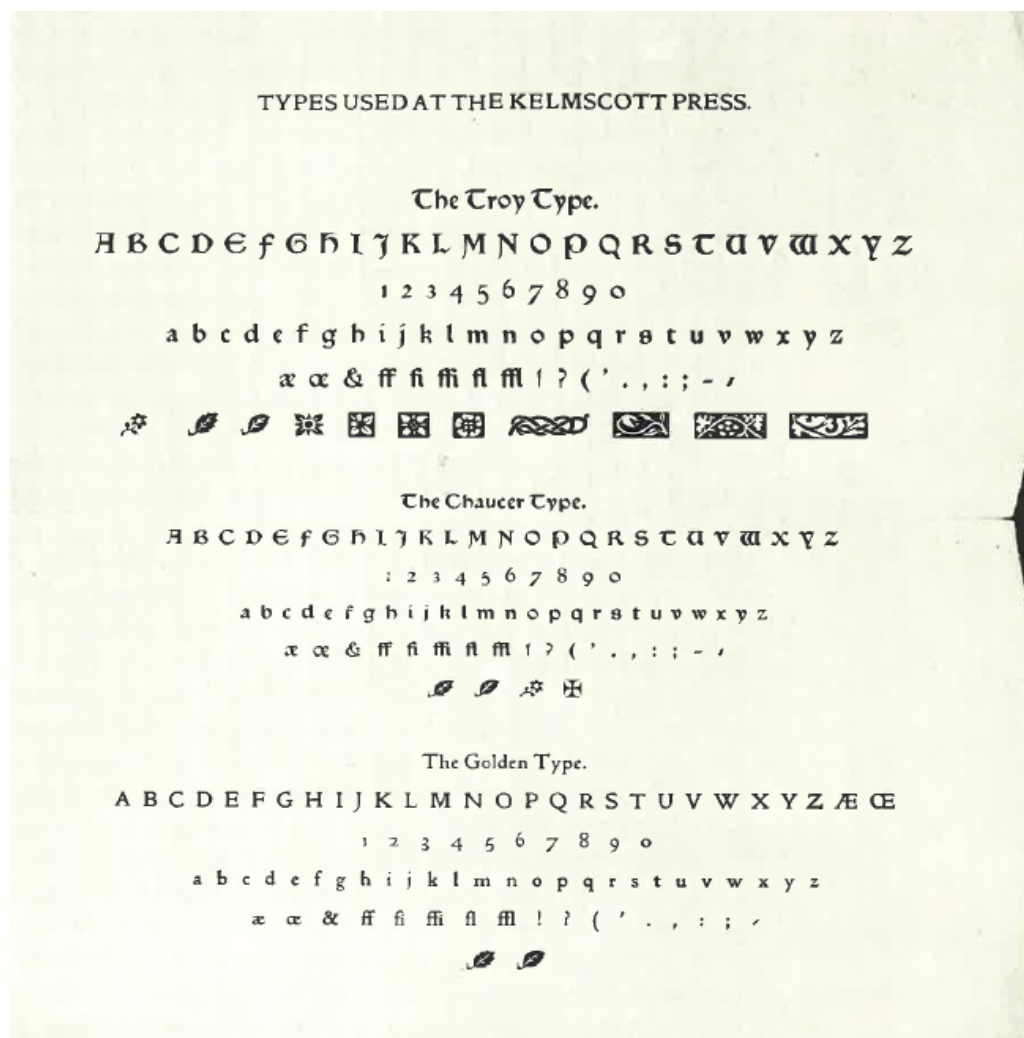
Figure 4. Specimen Sheet of Kelmscott Press types.

Victorian England, even in the 1890s, the types of Jenson and Rubeus were much darker

and heavier. Yet, instead of simply copying these models, "Morris deliberately thickened

the strokes (already rather thick in Rubeus's version) and disfigured the capitals with

heavy, slab-like serifs."[114] Morris's change of the letterforms from his original models

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[113] Peterson, "Introduction," xxv.
[114] Ibid.

resulted in a letter much more suited to his needs. Morris excitedly recorded that an

illustrator and friend of Morris's, "[Walter] Crane…saw it beside Jenson thought it more

Gothic-looking: this is a fact, and a cheerful one to me."[115] The combination of Morris's

thickening and adding heavy slabs onto what were already relatively heavy letters

resulting in a more Gothic-looking letterform did two things for Morris. First, it gave

him a typeface that he could use to fulfill his typographical, and beyond typographical,

ideas by giving him a dark, heavy type that was both black in and of itself, and allowed

Morris to justify jamming the letters on the books of the Kelmscott Press' pages closer

together, creating a blacker and more textured page. This endeavor was undoubtedly

only helped by the large 14-point size of the Golden type.[116] The visual-texture of the

page was only made more so by the "heavy, slab-like serifs" that Peterson asserts

disfigure the capitals of Morris's Golden type. Second, the thickness of the strokes and

Gothic quality of the letters allowed Morris to create a more unified page design,

something always central when he is composing page designs at the Kelmscott Press, as

the letters of the Golden type both fit better with the Gothic-esque ornament and

illustration in a Kelmscott book and are not overpowered by the thick lines of Morris's

wood-engraved illustrations, made after the style of mediaeval woodcuts. The ability to

create a unified page that does not attract the eye more to one part of the composition of a

two-page opening than others allows the reader/viewer's eyes to ebb and flow within the

composition, instead of being drawn to one part, a gesture that ruins the *in the world*

effect of a Kelmscott page, as was discussed earlier on in regards to the wood-engravings

in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1). Further, the word "coarse" always pops up in

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[115] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 90.
[116] Ibid.

criticisms and discussions of Morris's Golden type, something that certainly would have pleased him, as the typeface itself was being recognized as creating texture, even in its criticism.[117]

Morris also designed a second typeface called the Troy type, after *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (1892), the first book it was used in at the Kelmscott Press. Although the Golden type was certainly more than satisfactory for Morris's aims at the Kelmscott Press, the Troy type, as a truly Gothic-style type, was much more in fitting with Morris's idea of the letters as ornaments, as well as fitting better with the rest of Morris's Gothic-style ornamentation. In fact, Morris said in an 1893 lecture that "if he had his own way he would have all books printed in it."[118] Although Morris based the Troy type after the typefaces of Schoeffer at Mainz, Mentelin at Strassburg, and Günther Zainer at Augsburg, all of which are more conservative examples of Gothic type that the Victorian reader/viewer would be more comfortable with than other Gothic types, the Troy type is still undoubtedly ornamental.[119] This ornamental quality came from the fact the Gothic quality of the Troy type was certainly foreign from the typical encounter a Victorian reader/viewer had with a book. The Gothic quality of the Troy type was not only foreign to Victorian viewers, but also gave many of the letterforms a unique curving shape that could immediately grasp the eye and then flick it off across the page, only for the eye to be caught by another of the curves, leading the viewer *into* the page, *into* the world. Further, the Troy type was an 18-point font, much larger than the 14-point

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 91.
[119] Morris, "The Ideal Book," 76.

Golden type, which had already been deemed commercially unfit due to its large size.[120] The large size of the font not only enlarged the already incredibly heavy letterforms, much thicker than the Golden type even at similar sizes, creating a pattern of thicker strokes of black and white across the page, but also immediately almost swallowed the eye of a Victorian reader/viewer accustomed to the smaller types of the typical books made then, which were so small that in the 1890s, Morris had to declare that 10-point or 11-point fonts were the smallest sizes of type acceptable in books.[121] As the reader/viewer's eye is swallowed by the blackness of the Troy type, it must immediately expand, throwing the contents of the page into confusion, changing the words from signifiers to a deep pattern of black and white for the reader/viewer's eye to wander in, from bearers of meaning to meaning in and of itself.

There was, in fact, one more typeface used at the Kelmscott Press, called the Chaucer type as it was specifically made and only used for the *Kelmscott Chaucer*. The Chaucer type is simply a version of the Troy type scaled down to be a 12-point font.[122] Morris originally tried to print the *Chaucer* in the Troy type, printing trial pages from the "Franklin's Tale", but he found that printing the entire *Chaucer* in Troy would have been financially impossible, and had Emery Walker photographically reduce the size of the type.[123] Morris never seemed to have been entirely happy with the decision to reduce the size of the typeface in the *Chaucer*, as he wrote that the reason for this was that he was "driven by the necessities of the Chaucer (a double-columned book)."[124] As the Chaucer type has the same general shape as the Troy type, the Chaucer type was only

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[120] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 94.; Ibid., 90.
[121] Ibid., 87.
[122] Ibid., 94.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

used in the *Kelmscott Chaucer*, and the effect of the Chaucer type is so bound to the double columns of the *Chaucer*, we will not look into the effect of the Chaucer type until the next chapter, where the *Chaucer* will come into greater focus.

The final thing to note about Morris's ideals and use of typefaces is the lack of a large amount of characters from his fonts. Morris never designed an italic alphabet, a bold alphabet, or other characters that were deemed necessary by Victorian printers, such as brackets, dashes, and small capitals.[125] His lack of these characters, or rather lack of using these characters, was mostly for two reasons. The first was surely his want of an even patterned page. Although this is the exact opposite reason he used the small leaf ornaments as paragraph breaks, it comes to make a certain sense after his decision to use those leaf ornaments. The leaf ornaments act as both visual entrance to the page and a note to the eye that the page is to be a visual-physical experience rather than a visual-intellectual one. Further, there are only so many paragraph breaks in the two-page opening that forms the visually-textured piece of pattern that brings the body, through the eye, *into* the world. But if one were to add too many of these entry points, to add italics, bold, brackets, dashes, or small capitals, multiplying across the pages of the Kelmscott, the *being-in-the-worldness* the page attempts to cement would be ruined. Instead of becoming part of the texture of the page, as the few paragraph marks per page do, the juxtaposition of so many letters and so many non-letters on a page would only serve to break the texture, as the reader/viewer's eye is never allowed to settle into one firm, solid texture, instead having to constantly readjust to find the texture. Instead of allowing the eye to move back and forth, to ebb and flow, in the design, the introduction of too much

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[125] Ibid., 90.

symbolism onto a Kelmscott page would force the eye to move in and out, constantly

being visually pulled in and pushed out of the page, always nearing, but never quite being

in the world.

The second reason, specifically for Morris's lack of italic alphabets for his fonts,

is that it made it so he could not print "any editorial apparatus such as footnotes or

bibliographies."[126] The reason for this is surely that footnotes would, once again, serve

as a distracting feature from the patterned blocks of text comprising an opening, and that

editorial apparatus doesn't seem as fit to become decoration as the other elements printed

in a Kelmscott book. In fact, when Burne-Jones gave his copy of the *Kelmscott Chaucer*

to his daughter Margaret for her birthday, he inscribed a note within it saying, "I want

particularly to draw your attention to the fact that there is no preface to Chaucer, and no

introduction, and no essay on his position as a poet, and no notes, and no glossary; so that

all is prepared for you to enjoy him thoroughly."[127] Simply put, all that these

introduction, essays, notes, or glossary could do was distract the reader/viewer and take

them out from being *in* the page, *in* the world.

V. Ornamentation (and Illustration)

The final piece of the Kelmscott puzzle is the ornamentation (i.e. ornamented

initials and borders, among other more fluid things) and illustrations that take up so little

of the books, yet perhaps exemplify more than any other element what a Kelmscott book

can do. For the purpose of this study, and to understand the climate Morris was working

in and what the Victorian reader/viewer would expect of the typical (ornamented or

illustrated) book, let us first look at how illustrations were used in the typical Victorian

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[126] Ibid.
[127] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott* Chaucer, 35.

book. First, one must realize that, just like today, most books were neither ornamented nor illustrated (not including more utilitarian projects such as textbooks, scientific journals, etc.). This is not to say, however, that most Victorian reader/viewers had no experience with ornamented or illustrated books, but to simply state that ornamented or illustrated books were not the norm, similar to today. The ornamented or illustrated books printed in Victorian England had one major flaw according to Morris, and that was that the engravings, that would make the ornamentation and/or illustrations, and the text pages of the same book were printed using different processes and only joined when the book was bound.[128] This process destroyed the unity that Morris so sought for. Albert L. Cotton perhaps best describes Morris's uneasiness with this Victorian practice when he wrote in the August 1898 issue of *Contemporary Review*:

> Beautiful as pictures, they bear no apparent relation to the volumes
> which they illustrate; their charm is independent and extraneous;
> the artist clearly did not concern himself to harmonise them with
> the text or with each other; taken apart entirely from the books,
> they would lose nothing of their force. They are steel engravings,
> pure and simple, which might just as well have been issued
> separately in a portfolio.[129]

 Although certainly beautiful designs in and of themselves, the ornamentation and illustrations found in Victorian books were often designed not for the book, but to describe some part of the literature the book enshrined or simply as beautiful designs in and of themselves. We already saw this separation of the text and the ornamentation and illustration much earlier in this chapter, when discussing the illustrations in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1), which features both ornamentation and illustration, but it is worth reiterating that discussion again here. The wood-engravings found in *A Week at the*

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[128] Ibid., 20.
[129] Ibid., 21.

Land's End not only have no connection to the text, creating separate parts of the page and breaking the texture which the whole page or two-page opening can create, but also, with their range of values from dark black through to white and thicker lines, they overpower the text, further breaking the reader/viewer's ability to connect and move through the entire page, rather than just a part of it.

One of the major parts of Morris's attempt to combat the separation of text and ornamentation and illustration at the Kelmscott Press is his formation of an idea of illustration as ornament. He wrote in an essay that "a book that *must* have *illustrations*, more or less utilitarian, should, I think, have no actual *ornament* at all, because ornament and illustration must almost certainly fight."[130] Yet, the books of the Kelmscott Press *are* filled with both illustration and ornament. Unlike books "that *must* have *illustrations*…[and thus] no actual *ornament*," at the Kelmscott Press, the illustrations become ornament. That is not to say that they are not pictures, the visual equivalent of the literary that Morris was certainly pushing against at Kelmscott, because they certainly are and one can treat them as pictures if so desired, but to do so is unnatural; it is not the comfortable position the eyes and body slide into when interacting with a Kelmscott page.

We must then examine both the purpose of illustrations becoming ornament in the pages of a book and how the illustrations at the Kelmscott Press become ornamentation: how the illustrations become part of the dense texture of the page that so envelops the reader/viewer, even the reader/viewer unversed in Morris's ideas. To provide something

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[130] Samuel D. Albert, "'My Work Is the Embodiment of Dreams': Morris, Burne-Jones, and Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Book Design," in *Pocket Cathedrals: Pre-Raphaelite Book Illustrations*, ed. Susan P. Casteras (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1991), 94.

more concrete to ground this discussion, let us look, for visual and descriptive analysis, at

the opening comprised of the frontispiece and facing page from the 1894 Kelmscott-

printed *The Wood Beyond the World* (fig. 6). This page offers more of what Morris

wanted from his pages than earlier books printed at the Kelmscott page, as the

frontispiece of *The Wood Beyond the World* was one of the first times that "the image

was created specifically, and not reused from another project."[131] In fact, Peterson notes

that

> in the illustrated Kelmscott press books published before the
> *Chaucer* the wood-engravings always appeared alone on leaves
> that were blank on the verso; some were printed in an entirely
> separate operation and the leaves merely inserted when the book
> was bound, a procedure perilously close to the formal dichotomy
> of text and illustration that Morris always condemned in the books
> of others.[132]

It is unclear why this practice was done at the Kelmscott Press, but it certainly did not

help to make the illustrations a part of the book, ornament, as Morris preached for,

though it helps to explain why most illustrated Kelmscott books usually only had

illustrations on the title opening pages and the beginning of chapters. Regardless,

although the separation of text and illustrations this practice caused marred the

experience of interacting with the book as a whole, the effect of experiencing those

illustrated openings alone was surely worth the slight loss of unity throughout the book.

It was for the sake of that unity that the illustrations were made into ornament.

The major thing that made this possible was the style of Burne-Jones's illustrations, as

well as the visual affinity shared by Morris and Burne-Jones that was able to connect

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[131] Ibid., 97.

[132] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 153.

Morris's type and ornament with Burne-Jones's designs. Although several would

illustrate Kelmscott books, the only artist to ever illustrate more than one Kelmscott book

was Burne-Jones, who illustrated twelve of them.[133] Morris never seemed to be happy

with the work of any other illustrators, including Walter Crane, "one of the leading

illustrators in Victorian England," and Aubrey Beardsley, who held a grudge against

Morris for the rest of his short life after their brief encounter and was to parody the

Kelmscott Style in the 1893-4 Dent edition of Malory's *Morte D'arthur*.[134] Looking at

the illustrations and prints made by Beardsley, though spectacular, it is clear why Morris

thought them unfit for a Kelmscott book. However, it is less obvious why Morris did not

find satisfactory the designs Crane made for the second, 1894, version of *The Story of the*

Glittering Plain (the only book to be issued twice at the Kelmscott) (fig. 5).[135] Morris in

fact called this version of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* "his one Kelmscott Press

failure."[136]

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[133] Ibid., 154-159.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Velma Bourgeois Richmond, "Edward Burne-Jones's Chaucer Portraits in the Kelmscott Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review* 40 (2005): 2.
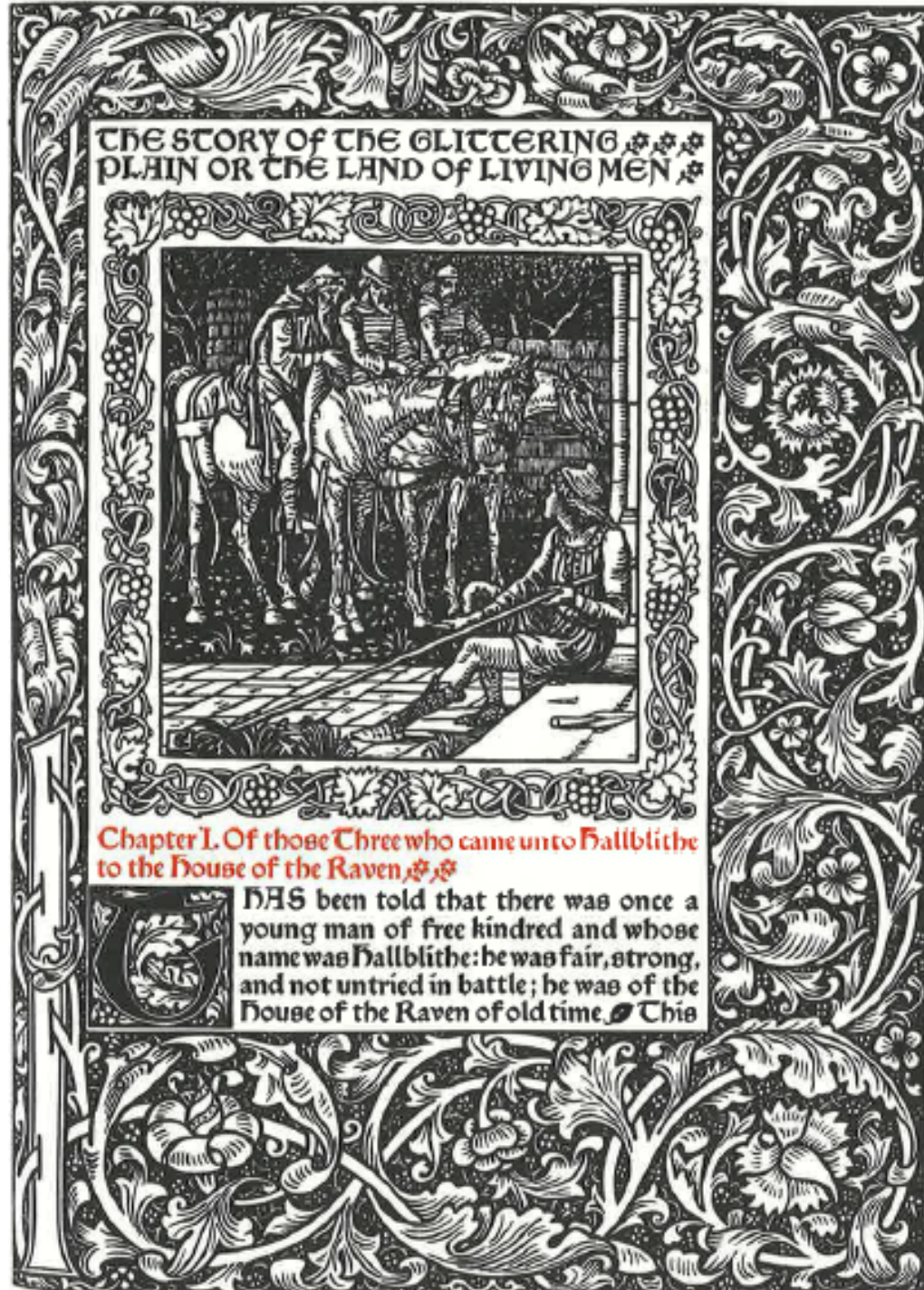
Figure 5. William Morris and Walter Crane, The Story of the Glittering Plain (Kelmscott Press, 1894).

Morris was probably unhappy with Crane's illustration for two reasons. The first

is the lack of pattern in most of Crane's design. Unlike the shifting black and white of

the rest of the page, much of Crane's design is either so dark or so white to be simply large planes of color. The minute, black and white, almost checkered look of the rest of the page is lost in this illustration, separating the illustration from the rest of the page, not allowing the reader/viewer to encounter the entire page at once, even if the illustration is acting as ornament. Perhaps this discord is why Morris tried to balance out the page by oddly adding the large white ornamented 'L' in the bottom left corner of the page, but this choice only exacerbates the problem in Crane's illustration. The second reason is that the illustration does not work as ornament. Morris's designs are always incredibly two-dimensional, emphasizing the material of the page that leads to the physical and visual-physical experience that consists of movement across the page instead of into it, if not out of the page and *into* the world with the bodily knowledge learned from the book. As Holbrook Jackson wrote in 1913, "The Kelmscott books look not only as if letter and decoration had grown one out of the other; they look as if they could go on growing."[137] On the other hand, Crane's design has a depth to it not found within the best-designed Kelmscott pages, with a distinct foreground, midground, and background drawing the eye into the space of the picture, into the page, into the interpretative mind rather than the dreaming, gliding body. Perhaps this is why Morris "rejected imitative art, the kind that, through the naturalism of its motifs, seems to open up a given surface," as Michaela Braesel notes.[138]

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[137] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 133.
[138] Michaela Braesel, "William Morris and "Authenticity"," *Canadian Aesthetics Journal* 15 (2008).

Figure 6. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, The Wood Beyond the World (1894).

Morris's designs, with both their initial flatness, that *shows* the reader/viewer the

world, and their intense compression, that pushes the reader/viewer out of the book, then

fit perfectly with Burne-Jones's illustrations as ornament, since Burne-Jones is known for

his distrust of any deep perspective as well as the relative flatness of his drawings.[139] Let

us look to the frontispiece opening of *The Wood Beyond the World* (fig. 6) to understand

how Burne-Jones's illustration works as ornament and how they work with the rest of the

page. In reference to the frontispiece illustration in *The Wood Beyond the World*, Samuel

D. Albert explains that "despite the multiple planes in the background, everything is

pushed so close together that virtually a single backdrop is created for the figure."[140]

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[139] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 153.
[140] Albert, "'My Work Is the Embodiment of Dreams': Morris, Burne-Jones, and Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Book Design," 97.

This flattening effect is only heightened by the merging together of the trees, in what should be the far background, with the figure's hair, from which the branches of the trees seem to grow and intertwine. This pushing of the furthest background into the same space as the figure, in the foreground, compresses the entire image so that any attempt to enter into the space of the picture leaves the reader/viewer back on its surface, with the rest of the book's ornament.

Where the several other illustrations and ornament we have examined, such as the ones in *A Week at the Land's End* (fig. 1) and the second version of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (fig. 5), fail in that they overpower the text, severing the space of the text from the space of the illustration and typically forcing undo focus on the illustrations or ornament, Burne-Jones's work on the frontispiece of *The Wood Beyond the World* (fig. 6) avoids these pitfalls. The constant back and forth interplay between black and white in the image not only allies it with the other ornament surrounding it, as well as across the entire opening, unifying the page, but also keeps any one part of the image from getting too black or too white, forcing undue attention on itself, and overpowering the rest of the ornament, further unifying the page. The unification of the illustration as ornament and the ornament of the rest of the page is only helped by the thin strip of white surrounding the image. Of the border, Albert comments that "the separation of the image from the border is achieved by a thin strip of black/white/black which harmoniously softens the transition from image to frame."[141]

The reason Burne-Jones's illustrations for the Kelmscott Press worked so well as ornament and within the frames that Morris designed is that Burne-Jones would always

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[141] Ibid.

ultimately evaluate his illustrations by looking at them upside down.[142] Instead of being

primarily judged by how well they told a story or were beautifully composed, the images

were judged by how well they created that textured, decorative quality, easier to

recognize when viewed from an alien perspective, and fit into the texture created by

Morris in the rest of the page. Burne-Jones beautifully sums up the role of his

illustrations at the Kelmscott Press in an 1894 letter to Charles Eliot Norton regarding the

work Burne-Jones was doing on the *Chaucer*: "I am making the designs as much to fit the

ornament and printing as they are made to fit the little pictures – and I love to be snugly

cased in the borders and buttressed up by the vast initials – and once or twice when I have

no letter under me, I feel tottery and weak; if you drag me out of my encasings it will be

like tearing a statue out of its niche and putting it in a museum."[143]

Although several of the Kelmscott books were illustrated and included illustrated

frontispieces as the first opening of the text, the first opening was not always designed

like this. And here is where what is perhaps Morris's most unique and original design

feature comes to be important, and that is what he does with titles. Peterson notes that

Morris never mentioned title pages in his essays or lectures, likely due to the fact that title

pages in the fifteenth century books he turned to for inspiration were either non-existent

or incredibly basic.[144] Although Morris's title pages were occasionally slightly more

elaborate than his fifteenth century models, they never contained the wealth of ornament

found on nearly every other Kelmscott page. However, he more than made up for this, in

his books without illustrated frontispieces, by the insertion of a second title page facing

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[142] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 163.
[143] Ibid., 164.
[144] Ibid., 129.

the first page of text, as can be seen in the first opening of Tennyson's *Maud*, printed at
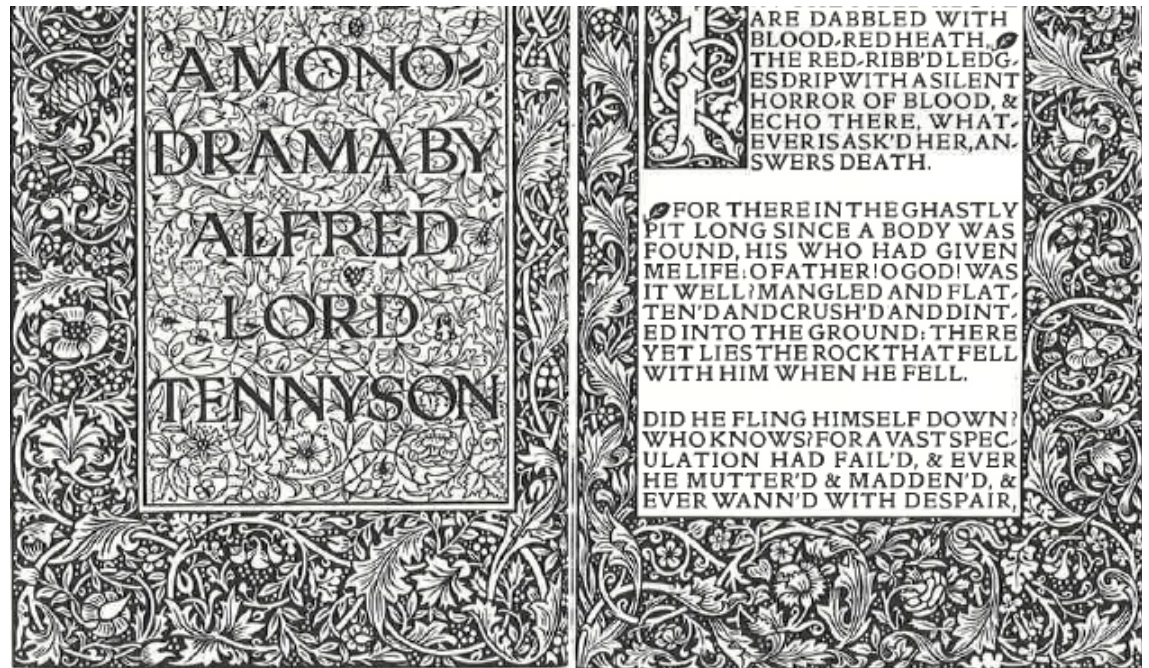
the Kelmscott Press in 1893 (fig. 7).

Figure 7. William Morris, Maud (1893).

These second title pages feature the title of the book in fonts Morris would design

specifically for that book, set in wood-engravings rather than type, with a background of

condensed floral or vine ornament, and surrounded by an ornamented border with a

different floral or vine ornament offset from the titles ornament by a box, similar to the

strip of black/white/black between *The Wood Beyond the World* frontispiece illustration

and border. The decorated border on the second title pages would match the one

surrounding the first page of text that faced the second title page.

It is in these openings, of the second title page/frontispiece and first page of text, where all of Morris's typographical ideas come to their greatest fruition in the typical Kelmscott volume. The matching decorated borders surrounding both pages make it so there is virtually no white separating the two pages, creating a two-page opening that acts simply as one composition, making it nearly impossible to look at the pages individually. This single two-page composition allows the reader/viewer to move back and forth through the opening with their eyes never able to settle anywhere, and never crossing over any part of the page that is not covered with a wealth of ornament, whether that be text or what is more traditionally ornament. While the reader/viewer experiences the *in-the-world* feeling of being lost in this opening of the world, of the book, their eyes are led constantly through the borders and boxes that populate these pages. Skoblow explains that "all this business of margins and frames, of boxes within boxes, is essential to Kelmscott: another gesture toward materiality (like the interpenetration of text and ornament), and a kind of metaphor of the books' separation—one must cross and cross in order to get inside, and must be beguiled along the way by ever-shifting forms."[145] Further, once readers/viewers finally find their way "inside" the designs of this first opening, they must work their way back through the near-impenetrable thicket of design if their eye is to explore the other part of the opening, if their eye is to cross through the boxes within boxes on the facing page.

Throughout this chapter I have been trying to describe how the physical and visual-physical textures produced by Morris's ideals and work at the Kelmscott Press can bring the reader/viewer *into* the world in the book, and then outside of the book. Despite

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[145] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 249.

this, I feel that there is still a somewhat large gap between my words and the experience of a Kelmscott volume. Skoblow, who has a similar goal in his "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern", although seemingly more focused on materiality for materiality's sake, describes this break between words, description of materiality, *being-in-the-world-ness*, and the actual experience of those things in interaction with a Kelmscott volume:

> I have been trying here to convey the pervasive materiality of a Kelmscott book (even reduced to facsimile), and if the exercise seems tedious or gratuitous—you *could* just go look at one yourself—this is a measure perhaps of the distance between materiality and words, of the ways in which what Kelmscott is about resists reduction to mere thought. Putting this the other way around: try to describe any ordinary book, and you'll see what I mean—there's almost nothing to describe.[146]

Perhaps it is *things* that invite, yet resist, description that most bring the encounterer into the world; the *things* that most challenge and strain those conscious, analytic parts of our mind that yearn for description and neat categorization of objects, ever reducing the visual and material wealth of universe surrounding the individual consciousness, that wealth that most fulfills our bodily desire for intense feeling, that which is most lost in the monotony of modern life. Or, perhaps, is it the other way around? Does conscious interaction with the *things* that modernity trains the individual to let pass them by, open, or re-open, the everyday world to intense feeling, intense meaning? Could deep description of the world around us determine how we move through the world?

A Pocket Cathedral

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[146] Ibid., 252.

"When the book is done…it will be like a pocket cathedral. My share in it that of the carver of images at Amiens, and Morris's that of the Architect and Magister Lapicida," is how Burne-Jones characterized the *Kelmscott Chaucer* when it was still in its production stage.[147] Magister Lapicida seems to be a term that means 'stone cutter' and which was what architects were called in certain areas of Europe during the Middle Ages. As noted in the previous chapters, at the Kelmscott Press Morris was trying to create *things* that could give the reader/viewer the transcendent feeling they could get from a cathedral, but that were also portable, and not in risk of destruction, or restoration. This portable *thing*, a Kelmscott book, attempted to become an emblem affirming realization of and connection with the modern world as, Morris and others believed, the cathedral (and art in general) during the Middle Ages imbued the everyday life of the populace with intense feeling. However, a Kelmscott book achieved this connectedness without the community aspect of the mediaeval cathedral, instead being a *thing* for the individual that they could carry with them during the movement caused by the modern loss of place. It is the *Kelmscott Chaucer* that most met the needs of the reader/viewer as this *thing*, through its "556 pages printed in black and red, with 87 woodcuts after designs by Burne-Jones; a double-page title, 14 large borders, 18 borders or frames for the pictures, 26 large initial words and innumerable ornamented initial letters large and small."[148] For that reason, this chapter will examine how the *Chaucer* becomes *thing*, bringing the reader/viewer *into* the world, and how it exudes more *thing*-ness than any other Kelmscott volume. We will also look at two projects that Morris never finished at the Kelmscott Press: Froissart's *Chronicles* (fig. 13), known through a few specimen

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[147] Richmond, "Edward Burne-Jones's Chaucer Portraits in the Kelmscott Chaucer," 6.
[148] Fridolf Johnson, "Introduction," in *William Morris: Ornamentation and Illustrations from The Kelmscott Chaucer* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), xiii.

pages, and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* (fig. 14), known only through a few unfinished initials, and how these unfinished projects show where Morris's ideas and aesthetics were headed.

Peterson remarks that "the *Chaucer* is far from being a typical Kelmscott volume, but it is certainly the most celebrated and frequently photographed, and it represents, in a sense, Morris's tendencies in book-design and ornamentation carried to their logical conclusion."[149] This kind of praise for the *Chaucer* has been happening since the book was issued in 1896. However, despite the praise and Peterson's assertion, the books printed at the Kelmscott do have several things in common with other Kelmscott volumes, such as paper, ink, margins, typeface, and the placement of words, letters, and lines on the page, all of which were already discussed in the last chapter, and which remain constants throughout almost all, or maybe nearly all, Kelmscott books. Having discussed these elements as part of all Kelmscott volumes, including the *Chaucer*, this chapter will focus on the parts of design at the Kelmscott that Morris innovated or improved upon in the *thing* that is the *Chaucer*, including bindings, the use of Chaucer type in double columned pages, and title page/illustration/ornamental work in the book.

For the sake of this study we will use four two-page openings from the *Chaucer* that most exemplify how the *Chaucer* acts as *thing*, as well as being representative of the entire book. The four openings will be the opening comprising of the second title page and the first page of text

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[149] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 229.

Figure 8. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, Kelmscott Chaucer, First Opening (1896).
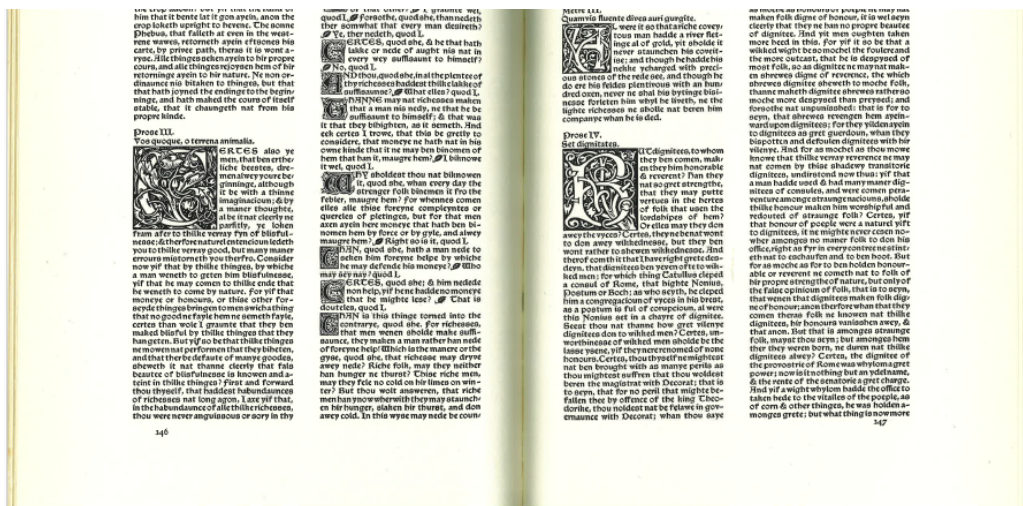

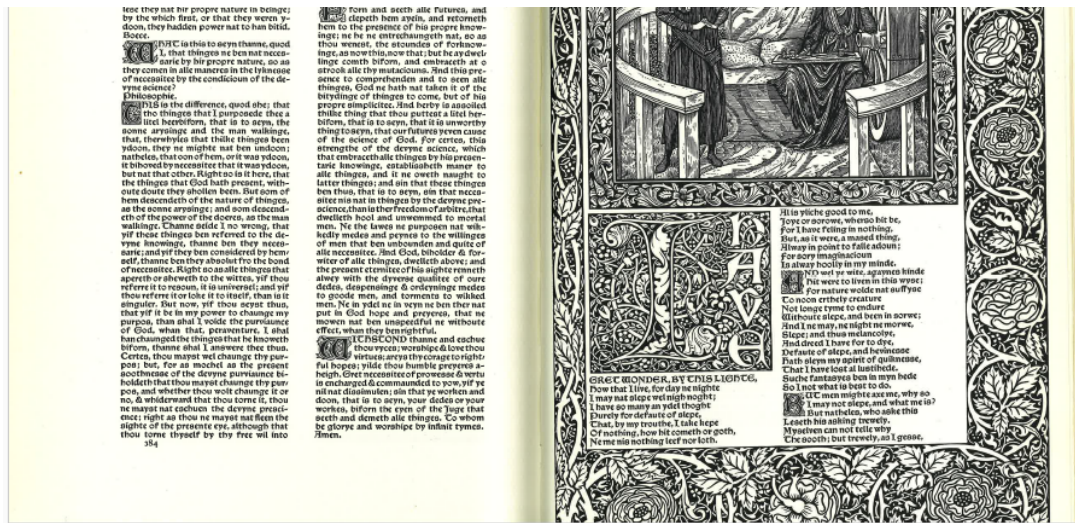*Figure 9. William Morris, Kelmscott Chaucer, Text Opening (1896).*

Figure 10. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, Kelmscott Chaucer, Text and Ornamented Opening (1896).
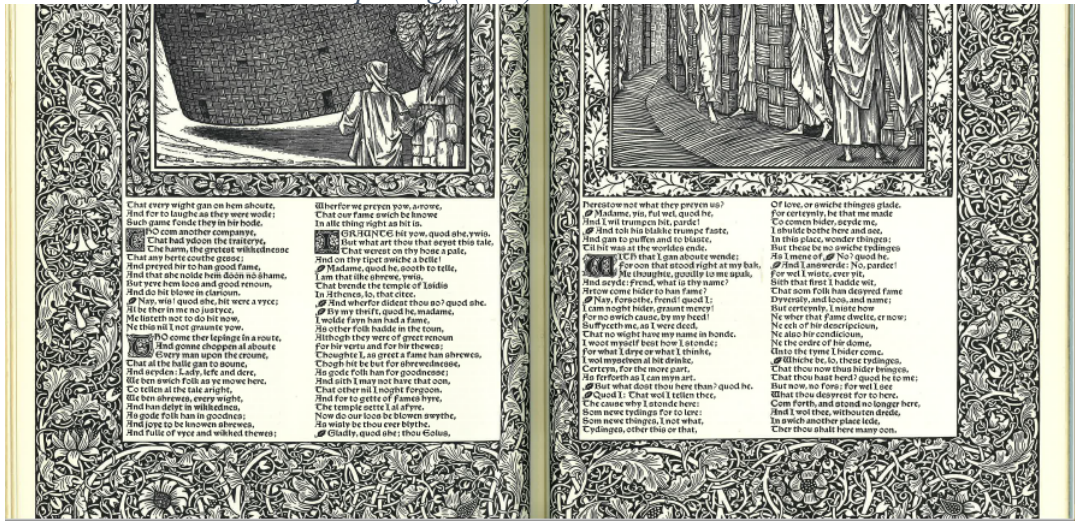

Figure 11. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, Kelmscott Chaucer, Ornamented Opening (1896).

(fig. 8), pages 346 and 347 which offer an example of the typical opening containing text

(fig. 9), pages 384 and 385 which offer an example of an opening with text on one side

and text with borders and illustration on the other (fig. 10), and pages 466 and 467 which

offer an example of text with borders and illustrations on both pages (fig. 11). Although

these four openings do not include every kind of opening found in the *Chaucer*, most

notably excluding an opening with text only on one side and text with border on the

other, they offer good examples of the diversity of openings found within the *Chaucer*,

while being representative of all pages in the *Chaucer*, which comprise only of different

riffs on the formula found in the four openings chosen for this study.

I. Bindings

Morris only ever strayed from the typical choices of bindings for a Kelmscott

book, that is quarter-linen with paper on boards and vellum, for the *Chaucer*.[150]

Although most of the copies of the *Chaucer* were still issued in the quarter-linen with

paper on boards, the problems of which were discussed in the last chapter, Morris also

issued forty-eight copies in a pigskin binding he designed, and that was made at the

Doves Bindery (fig. 12).[151] The availability of two choices for bindings, with one being

considerably cheaper as well as almost completely unsuitable for the *thing* that was the

Chaucer, is still just as problematic as it was when Morris was issuing books in quarter-

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[150] Ibid., 117.
[151] Ibid., 244.

linen with paper on boards and vellum, especially since buying a paper copy of the
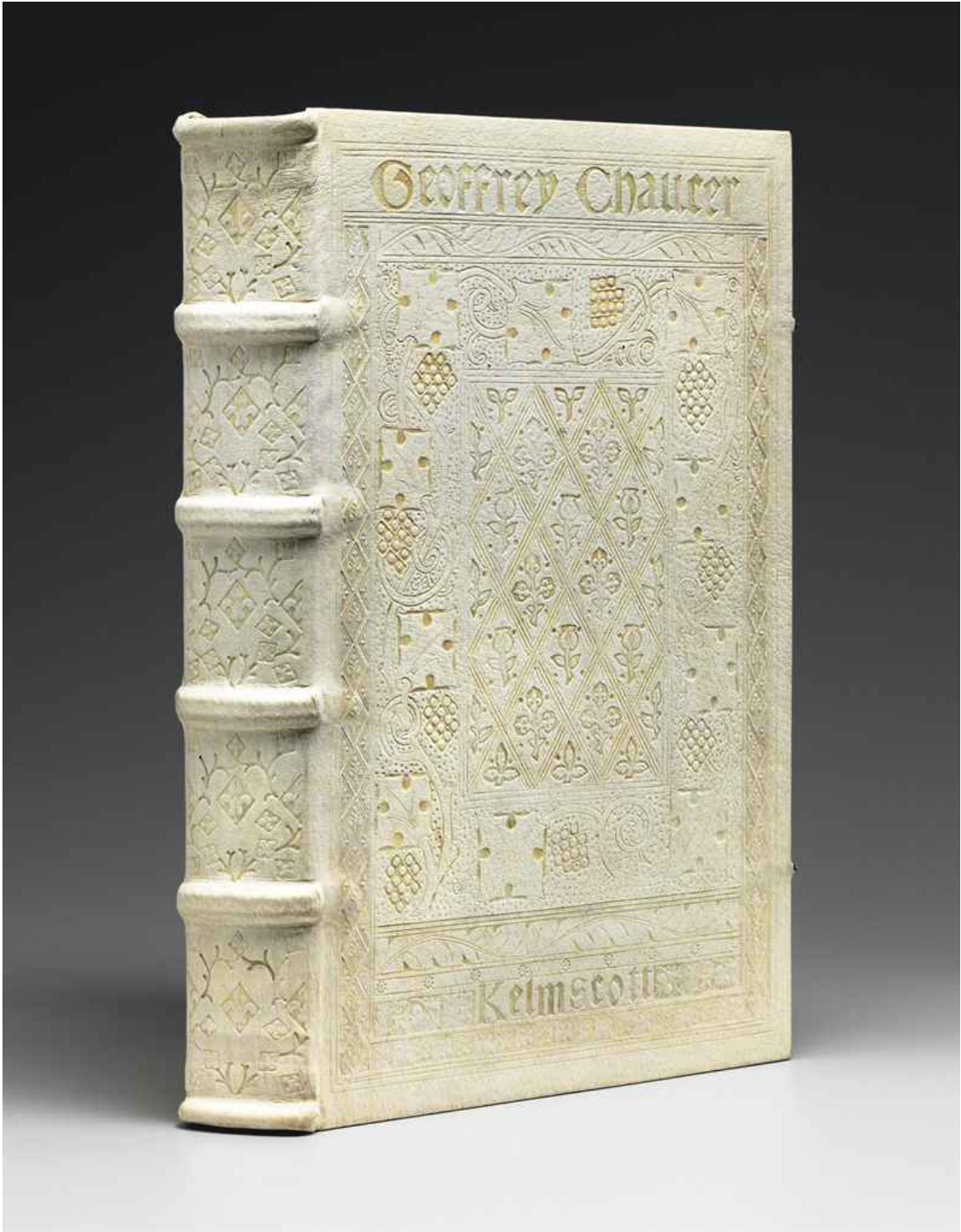
Figure 12. William Morris and Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, Kelmscott Chaucer, Pigskin Binding (1896).

Chaucer with a pigskin binding nearly doubled the cost of the book from £20 to £33.[152]

A large amount of this cost was certainly from the material cost of the pigskin, but a lot

was also probably from having the binding made at the Doves Bindery, which attempted

to follow the same arts-and-crafts handicraft ideals the Kelmscott Press aspired to. And,

of course, the argument could be made that this handicraft production was an essential

part of how the *thing* became a *thing*, but it is also true that Morris had most of his books

bound at J. and J. Leighton, a commercial firm. I do not wish to argue that this handicraft

ethos does not add or make greater the *thing*-ness of the book, but that it is not entirely

necessarily for the book to become a *thing*. The interaction between the *thing* and the

reader/viewer is mediated not by knowledge of its production; it is mediated by the

physical and visual-physical material design of the *thing*. And this is why the fact that a

circular distributed by the Kelmscott Press in 1896 that said Morris would design four

Chaucer bindings ("(1) a full pigskin from the Doves Bindery, (2) a half pigskin from the

Doves Bindery, (3) a full pigskin from J. and J. Leighton, (4) a half pigskin from

Leighton") is important.[153] Although only one of these bindings was in fact executed,

Morris was attempting to create a mass produced, cheaper version of the pigskin binding,

bound at the same firm that did his quarter-linen bindings, J. and J. Leighton. Although

these proposed pigskin bindings would surely not stand up to the ones produced at the

Doves Bindery, they also would probably not have increased the price of the book as

substantially. For this reason, let us, in this study, treat the one kind of pigskin binding

that was executed as an example of the ideal binding, both in its *thing*-ness and

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[152] Ibid., 253.
[153] Ibid., 244.

availability to a wider audience, that Morris sought at the Kelmscott Press, for the *Kelmscott Chaucer*.

Fridolf Johnson describes the pigskin binding as such: "a specially designed binding was executed in white pigskin over oak boards and with silver clasps."[154] These material parts of the design, white pigskin, oak boards, silver clasps, merge and become one with the visual aspect of the design. When the binding is first seen it almost looks like one of the denser pages of design within the book. This effect is only enhanced further by the white of the pigskin, which is nearly the same color as the paper within the book. The pigskin binding of the *Chaucer* then becomes a kind of physical and visual-physical prelude-experience of the book, showing and teaching the reader/viewer how to interact with the pages of the book, so that they can enter *into* the world. As the binding is the reader/viewer's first interaction with the book, it is key to reader/viewer's experience with the book. Before the reader/viewer even opens the book, the sensuality of the book rears itself upon them, through the dense floral design, the ornamental text that merges with the design, the physical texture of the stamped design, and the suppleness of the pigskin, which only increases with age and offers a material the body is more used to associating with sensuous feeling, that is leather, than paper. Then, the book leads the reader/viewer to unclasp the silver clasps with their right hand, the absence of texture in the smoothness of the silver making their hand yearn again for the sensuous binding, as their left hand still revels in it. As the reader/viewer then pulls the cover up with their left hand the visual-physical textures of the binding are instantly replaced by the ones on the pages, that are perhaps even denser, and the right hand

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[154] Johnson, "Introduction," xiii.

reaches out towards the sensuous materiality of a Kelmscott page, the absence of

sensuous texture on the silver clasp being replaced by the Kelmscott page, and the

sensual suppleness of the pigskin coming to be bodily associated with that of the paper.

The simple experience of opening a book becomes, with the *Chaucer*, a bodily entrance

into the world.

II. Chaucer Type and Double-Columned Pages

Another of the unique design choices made in the *Chaucer* was the use of

Chaucer type, a reduced 12-point version of the Troy type, along with arranging the text

on each page into two columns. Both of these choices seem odd in light of Morris's

views on creating a dark, textured block of text on each page with the help of large

decorative texts, such as the 14-point of the Golden and 18-point of the Troy. And,

although the 12-point Chaucer type was still larger than commercially used types, Morris

seemed to have been, at least initially, unhappy with it, saying that he was "driven by the

necessities of the Chaucer (a double-columned book)" to create it.[155] He seemed to have

been forced into the decision to print in small type and double-columns. Although it may

seem that these design choices limit the page's ability to bring the reader/viewer *into* the

page, like the excess of white on the typical Victorian book page, as exemplified by *A*

Week at the Land's End (fig. 1), it does not seem that this was the case, since in 1895,

Morris commented on the planned folio of Froissart's *Chronicles* (fig. 13), which was to

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[155] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 94.

be printed in double-columns also, saying both that he was overjoyed by the work he had done on it and that it was going to be printed in the Chaucer type.[156]

To examine how, then, the combination of the Chaucer type and double-columns bring the reader/viewer *into* the world, let's look to the *Chaucer* opening of pages 346 and 347 (fig. 9) that consist of text only, since the already discussed ornamentality of the letters as unified with the ornamentation still holds here, so we only need to examine how an opening consisting of only text works. While in most Kelmscott books the iconic quality of the letters due to their size is a large part of what makes them ornamental, the incredibly large size of each sheet of paper in the *Chaucer* would dwarf even those larger fonts. Here the 12-point size of the Chaucer type shines. With the large size of the paper in the *Chaucer*, the letters become one incredibly tight, dense mass, seeming to almost take the shape of the borders found on other pages of the book. This produces blocks of text on each page that are much darker and ornamental than on the typical Kelmscott page. However, as has already been noted, Morris's typographical aim was not simply to turn the page black, it was to create visual-physical texture on the page, and that is why the double-columns become important. Instead of simply allowing the white to enter the page and break the unity of the page, the double-columns lighten up the dark blocks of text, bringing texture into the darkness. The white between the columns, in blocks just like the text, becomes part of the pattern, allowing the white absence of texture to only enhance the reader/viewer's conception of the texture of the blocks when their eyes return to them. This cohesive design is helped by the thinness of space between the columns, making it so that the white does do this, instead of breaking the page into

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[156] Ibid., 263.

separate pieces. The double-columns also allow for the number of ornamented initials on each page to double, as the initials can be in either column on the page, only heightening the effect of the type. The combined effect of the Chaucer type and double-columns, though damaging to Morris's ideas on their own, creates openings in the *Chaucer* much more richly textured than in nearly any other Kelmscott book.

III. Title Page/Illustration/Ornament

W.R. Lethaby, one of Morris's disciples, wrote that Morris "used to say that all good designing was felt in the stomach."[157] Perhaps it is in the stomach, the core of the body, that the paths of physical feeling through the fingers and visual-physical feeling through the eyes meet, but whatever the case, in designing the *Chaucer*, Morris and Burne-Jones were to create a book that was just as pleasing to the body, the stomach, as it was to the mind. One key to this is the proliferation of ornament throughout the book. Johnson writes that "altogether [Morris] designed no less than 384 initials of various sizes; of the letter *T* alone there are at least 34 varieties. These, together with the borders, title pages, inscriptions, frames and printers' marks, total 664 separate designs by Morris."[158] Of course, not all of these were used in the *Chaucer*, but it is certainly the most heavily ornamented of all Kelmscott books, excluding perhaps *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne*. Boos observes that

> the profusion of Morris's designs and devices also permitted him
> to vary the configurations from page to page. Nineteenth-century
> readers encountered such echeloned devices as initial S's in a
> column, or white-on-black and black-on-white initials on facing
> pages; or cascading leaves…In works such as the Kelmscott
> Chaucer, the fractal self-similarities become so complex that it

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[157] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott* Chaucer, 34.
[158] Johnson, "Introduction," xi.

becomes difficult if not impossible for a reader to discern whether they replicate each other.[159]

Examples of this can be seen in the openings of pages 346 and 347 (fig. 9), 384 and 385 (fig. 10), and 466 and 467 (fig. 11), as well as every other opening in the *Chaucer*.

How did these "fractal self-similarities" of ornament contribute to bringing the reader/viewer *into* the world through prolonged physical and visual-physical interaction with the book? One of Ruskin's principles of the Gothic that he sets out in "The Nature of Gothic", a work that Morris called "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century," is "changefulness".[160] Ruskin says that

> 'Changefulness, or variety'…must include periods of 'darkness' and 'repetition,' for 'monotony in a certain measure, used in order to give value to change…is as essential in architectural as in all other composition…those who will not submit to the temporary sameness, but rush from one change to another, gradually dull the edge of change itself.'[161]

In the *Chaucer*, Morris's multitudes of designs, in their "fractal self-similarities", bring a constantly new, but yet familiar, experience from each new page, or even within a single page. Take for example, the two different *T* initials used in the second column on page 346 (fig. 9). The constant assault of ornament, all of extremely similar style but new to the eye, on the eye, as the hands of the reader/viewer flip the pages, prolongs the dreamlike feeling of being *in* the world incited by the book by always offering up to the eye something new (perhaps, one is never sure), but that is the nearly the same as what one has been seeing. This is why unified design is important not only in a single opening, but throughout the entire book. Any drastic change would break the

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[159] Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 70-71.
[160] Ibid., 71.
[161] Ibid.

reader/viewer out of their reverie, but if the work becomes too mechanically repetitive, the eye grows bored. It is the organic growth of the ornament not only in a single opening, but also throughout the entire book that can grant the reader/viewer an extended, non-momentary, glimpse *into* the world.

Yet to only focus on the slowly ever-changing ornament of the *Chaucer* is to ignore what is perhaps its most unique feature: the eighty-seven wood-engraved illustrations by Burne-Jones.[162] Burne-Jones described his contributions to the *Chaucer* as such: "I hope sincerely it will be all the age does not want – I have omitted nothing I could think of to obstruct the onward march of the world."[163] It is this desire for slowing down, a reconsideration of industrial-fueled 'progress', that is intricately linked to being *in* the world. Burne-Jones's illustrations seems to have done the work he set out for them to do, with his contribution increasing from the originally planned forty-eight illustrations to the final eighty-seven, and Walker commenting that "[Burne-Jones] had gone on putting in as many as he liked, knowing that the more he drew the better Morris would be pleased."[164]

Burne-Jones's illustrations mostly work with Morris's ornament, to bring the reader/viewer *into* the world, in two ways. The first is in how the illustrations become simply textures, extending and growing from the textures of Morris's ornament, offering another portion of the page where the eye can get lost in the minutiae of black against white and white against black, similarly to how Morris's and Burne-Jones's frontispiece for *The Wood Beyond the World* worked, as discussed in the last chapter. Robinson has

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[162] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 244.
[163] Ibid., 252.
[164] Ibid., 247.

observed in the *Chaucer* illustrations a "recurring pattern of a 'flat back of the room,

often recessed, with a gently curved vault and pierced further with either a window or a

door'; in the outdoor scenes, he adds, there is frequently a three-layer composition, using

a wall or battlements to divide the picture plane horizontally'."[165] These devices, of the

"flat back of the room" or a "three-layer composition", bring a lack of depth to Burne-

Jones's illustrations that bring the space in the illustrations, usually recessed behind the

picture plane, up towards the picture plane that Morris's ornament rests on. Something

similar to the first of these devices, the "flat back of the room", which uses lack of

physical depth in the picture along with dense, thick, repeating lines to turn the

illustration into ornament (helped along by the ornament surrounding it) can be found in

the illustrations on both pages of the opening that comprises pages 466 and 467 (fig. 11).

The wicker-like texture that takes up most of both illustrations become a kind of thicket,

somehow compressing Morris's already dense ornamentation, ensnaring the

reader/viewer's eye, which, when it can finally tear itself free, reaches not towards an

understanding of the picture, but to the ornament surrounding the picture. When the eye

comes back to the picture, it treats it only as sumptuous ornament, instead of something

to be made into a representation. The illustration on the right page of the opening on

page 384 and 385 (fig. 10) does something similar with a "three-layer composition."

While this illustration has foreground, midground, and, notably, distant background, it

also has nearly no depth to it. The horizontal lines that make up the sky along with the

horizontal breaking of the picture plane by what I can only call a vertical block of texture

in upper-middle part of the picture causes what should be distant background to be at

nearly the same depth as the figures. This effect, combined with the multitude of other

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[165] Ibid., 250.

textures that weave in and out of each other in the picture, like the dark striping making up so much of the picture or the vine-pattern that takes up the entire central vertical of the picture, makes the illustration, for the reader/viewer, into ornament.

Yet to treat Burne-Jones's illustrations as simply ornament and not pictures, because they are pictures of course, is to lose something central to the *Chaucer*. Robinson describes the illustrations as capturing the "mixture of dream and fantasy that permeates the whole book."[166] It is in this dreaminess that lulls the reader/viewer into a hypnagogic state that Burne-Jones and the *Chaucer* fully come alive and become fully able at bringing the reader/viewer *into* the world for extended moments. One way that Burne-Jones's illustrations lull the reader/viewer into this hypnagogic state is through Burne-Jones's almost surreal interpretations of Chaucer. Burne-Jones wrote that "in the book I am putting myself wholly aside and trying to see things as [Chaucer] saw them; not once have I invaded his kingdom with one hostile thought."[167] This way that Burne-Jones re-read Chaucer in preparation for his illustrations led to a great deal of literalness in Burne-Jones interpretations of Chaucer's words. An example of this can be found in the illustrations of both pages of the opening of pages 466 and 467 (fig. 11). Chaucer's house 'made of twigges' is taken by Burne-Jones and made into a giant wicker basket.[168] Chaucer's story is transformed by Burne-Jones into a surreal image of a giant, floating wicker basket complete with doors and windows, and filled with mysterious, slender, robed women. The images are not of this world; they are of somewhere else.

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[166] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott* Chaucer, 34.
[167] Ibid., 25.
[168] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 244.

This otherworldly effect of the images is only heightened by the figures that populate Burne-Jones's illustrations. Velma Bourgeois Richmond comments on the "elvyssh" quality of Burne-Jones's figures. She writes that

> the literal meaning of 'elvyssh'—mysterious, not of this world—
> aptly fits Burne-Jones's style of painting, repeatedly faulted for not
> being 'realistic'…But 'elvyssh' expresses his basic experience: 'Of
> course imagining doesn't end with my work: I go on always in that
> strange land that is more true than real.'[169]

This "strange land that is more true than real" is similar in its effect to the visions Morris and Burne-Jones had in their younger days, where the intense feeling of the vision becomes as, if not more, important than the vision itself. Through his illustrations in the *Chaucer*, partially due to how many dot its pages, Burne-Jones attempts to convey this feeling to the reader/viewer.

However, the etherealness of Burne-Jones and the materiality of Morris seem essentially at odds. As Burne-Jones himself notes, "I like a thing 'perfect,' and [Morris] says he likes a thing done."[170] Yet, instead of their ideals opposing each other, in their synthesis, their seemingly opposed ideals find a common ground that exemplifies the entire Kelmscott project. Both Burne-Jones's otherworldliness and Morris's worldliness are sharpened again and again throughout their careers to grasp at some way of making available to the reader/viewer intense feeling. In the opening of the second title page and first text page (fig. 8), one finds what perhaps most exemplifies how Morris's and Burne-Jones's desires could come together to create something which almost no reader/viewer can take their eyes away from, can pull themselves away from, being *shown* the world.

[169] Richmond, "Edward Burne-Jones's Chaucer Portraits in the Kelmscott Chaucer," 5.
[170] Ibid., 11.

Although the order of the reader/viewer's engagement differs by what first immediately attracts their eye, the page synthesizes everything discussed so far as follows: as the eye first treats itself to the sumptuousness of the page, it delights upon a typical, but no less effective, border of swirling grape vines, traipsing up and around the paper, as well as back into itself. As the eye eventually tires of this, it journeys on towards the even finer floral design backing the massive letters that intertwine with the vines until it lights upon the *G* and *C* that seem to have grown, repeatedly flowering out from the page, straight from the vines backing them. The eye then wanders, hungrily, across to the other page, basking in the almost indecipherable, folding in upon itself, "Whan", until briefly resting and taking pleasure in the lighter box comprising of the text, and subsequently ambling up towards the picture, which had somehow not been recognized as picture before, temporarily being sidetracked by yet another border, only to eventually find a nearly empty landscape with only a willowy, expressionless figure, book in hand, to greet them. This reminds the eye; there may be sumptuous feeling outside the book. After it has explored this theory, the eye returns to the page to try to find, once again, that intense, yet dreamlike, feeling, starting the process all over again, until the hand, fingering perhaps at the edge of the page, flips the page, as this was only the first opening. The intense, bodily feeling shared by this first opening with the reader/viewer carries on until the last, and perhaps this is why Burne-Jones said, "When Morris and I were little chaps at Oxford, we should have just gone off our head if such a book had come out then, but we have made at the end of our days the very thing we would have made then if we could," as the *Chaucer* became the embodiment of their collective dreams.[171]

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[171] Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer*, 9.

IV. Froissart's *Chronicles* and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung*

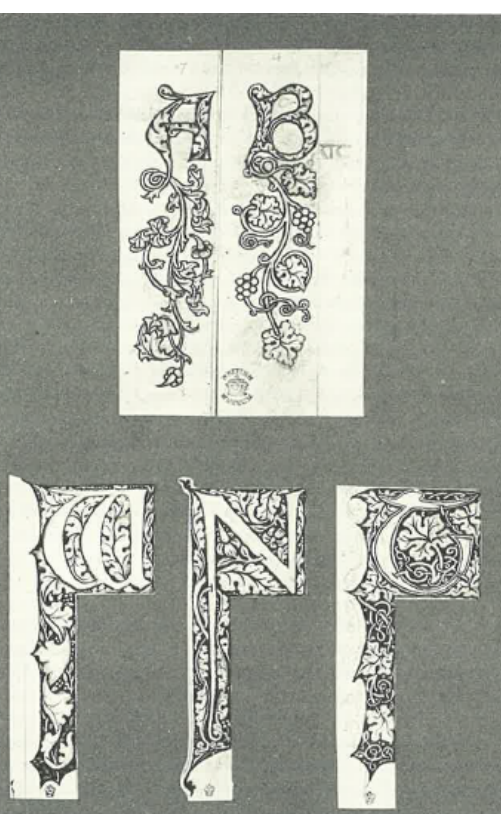*Figure 13. William Morris, Froissart Specimen Page* (Kelmscott Press, 1895-96).

Figure 14. William Morris, The Story of Sigurd the Volsung (Kelmscott Press, 1895-96).

Although neither had much work done on it by Morris, both Froissart's *Chronicles* and *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* were projected as future Kelmscott volumes. The work that was done on both projects shows an evolution of Morris's designing principles, and a glimpse of what could have been made at the Kelmscott Press after the *Chaucer*, had Morris lived longer. We have a few specimen pages of Froissart's *Chronicles* (fig. 13) and some initials that Morris designed for the *Sigurd* (fig. 14), which would, in 1898, be published in a form devoid of much ornamentation, a form very different than what Morris was envisioning. While we are left with little from either book today, we have enough for Peterson to claim that "the Froissart specimen pages

leave no doubt that Morris's comparatively early death robbed the world of a work which would have rivalled the *Chaucer* as one of the finest printed books of the post-mediaeval era."[172]

The major step forward for Morris's typographic designing in the two unfinished works, which can be seen best in the Froissart, is his evolution of the initials. The *T* initial, as sumptuously patterned as any Morris had done before, extends and merges into the border surrounding the text. Albert claims that "this extant page…confirms how brilliantly Morris finally overcame the problem which had plagued him[,]…the coordination of all visual elements on a page."[173] The unity of text and ornament is brought even further due to how the edges of the initial is designed. Instead of the typical rectangular border of Morris's initials, seen on this very page in the large *A* in the bottom right of the page, his new *T* has pointed tendrils, extending into the previously blocked off area of the text. It seems almost as if Morris's text will finally lose its shape and grow into the surrounding ornament; as if the finely toiled garden of the text has been left to itself and the growth inside and outside the planter attempts to connect itself. Another new thing Morris does in this Froissart specimen page is to attempt also to more fully merge illustration and ornament with the coats of arms along the bottom of the page. Although coats of arms already exist somewhere between ornament and illustration, Morris attempts to fully integrate them into the page as ornament, with the vines cutting through and holding the shields to the page. Although Morris's experiments on the

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[172] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 266.
[173] Albert, "'My Work Is the Embodiment of Dreams': Morris, Burne-Jones, and Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Book Design," 101.

specimen page are small, they only show how his ideas were constantly after some way

to make the book ever more so *thing*.

The Kelmscott Press in the World

This study has so far tried to show both why Morris wanted to make books into

things and how, through their design, the books became *things*. Although this study has

shown how Morris's books could become *things*, it is necessary to ask if they did achieve this; if, in the time that they were issued, they achieved their goal of bringing people *into* the world, providing them with a non-commodified mode of vision. The overwhelming evidence shows unfortunately that the answer to this question is that the Kelmscott books did not achieve this. In fact, they became quite the opposite of what they aimed to, becoming more evocative of commodities than the books that Morris set himself against. The Kelmscott books were treated not as *things* that could enrich everyday life for their owners, and eventually the general populace, but as fine art objects for the extremely wealthy. Despite having all the qualities of *things*, the Kelmscott books could not form meaningful connection with the general populace of Victorian England.

One of the reasons for that disconnection is the Kelmscott Press and the realities of book production in Victorian England, undoubtedly. At the Press, only fifty-two books and a set of specimen pages for the *Froissart* were printed between 1891 and 1898, continuing for two years after Morris had died in 1896. With his death, the books printed after were simpler in style, having no new ornament created for them as well as the lack of Morris as designer.[174] Each of these books were printed in editions numbering on average 300 copies.[175] These limited press runs mean that the Kelmscott Press produced about 15,600 books over the course of its existence. While this may seem a large amount of books, it is infinitesimally small when compared to the overall population of England at the time, as well as the undoubtedly large amount of books produced for this population.

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[174] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 4.
[175] Ibid.

The influence of such a small number of *things*, if one can assume that the earlier books and the books made after Morris's death did in fact achieve *thing*-ness, could, then, only be felt if it influenced the creation of more *things*. As Johnson notes "because Morris lived and wrought so well, we no longer turn out books that are a hodgepodge of type styles and a grab-bag of pictures and interloping 'decorations' that have no relation to each other or to the page of type. Willy-nilly is out; careful planning is in."[176] Peterson spends an entire chapter of his book *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure* charting Morris's overwhelming influence on both private presses and commercial printing in the twentieth century.[177] Yet, while Morris's typographical principles were influential, particularly that quest to create a unified book and make dark pages of type, the *thing*-ness of the book was lost on many influenced by him.

Although the influence of Morris and many other typographical reformers certainly improved the state of commercial printing at the turn of the century, many of the ideas central to Morris's conception of the book were lost in the translation to volume. All of Morris's pleas for finer, textured materials to be used in the book were simply ignored due to both cost and the realities of industrialized printing of books, which forced upon the printer certain material constraints such as the use of thinner inks. On top of this, the overwhelming trend for books both in the early twentieth century and continuing until today has been not the addition of ornament and illustration, but the doing away of it. While Morris and the Kelmscott Press were in some way influential on commercial book printing, the overwhelming influence was not to make the book more of a *thing*, but

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[176] Johnson, "Introduction," xiv.
[177] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 275-313.

to make its pages better designed; "careful planning" was in.[178] While better designed pages of type are certainly not bad things in and of themselves, the standardization of type and design throughout the book completely misses that which Morris most desired from the book and certainly does not stop the further etherealizing of the object.

Morris's influence on private presses may be said to be larger than it was on commercial printing, but those influenced still miss large parts of what made the Kelmscott books so important for both the individual and society, according to Morris. The Kelmscott Press, even in its day, was one of the most famous private presses, and although the Kelmscott Press was important in bringing into physical existence the ideals of many Victorian typographical reformers, its influence is usually overstated. The pleas for better designed pages and the use of finer materials in books were also made by several of Morris's contemporaries, and would be carried, from both Morris and these contemporaries to future private presses.

What was unique about the Kelmscott Press, and what was not transmitted to any of the private presses after the Kelmscott, was the use of material and typography, including heavy use of ornament, to create a page for the viewer to get lost *in* and then bind these pages together to create a *thing*; to make books for looking, not only reading. The private presses following Morris in the Twentieth Century were certainly less of the Morris school of overwhelming design and more of that school defined by Beatrice Warde, who in a well-known essay wrote that "good printing should be invisible: like a crystal goblet, it is a transparent medium which encloses the wine of literature."[179] While someone interested only in writing voice and content can have no qualms with Warde's

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[178] Johnson, "Introduction," xiv.
[179] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 133.

sentiments, those sentiments completely ignore the relationship of text and image that

Morris was to exploit so fruitfully at the Kelmscott Press. Perhaps the most important

thing that Morris did for the private press movement was that, as the noted bibliographer

and bibliophile A.W. Pollard observed in 1934, "he proved the existence of a public

willing to pay for the cost of print and paper, even when print and paper were the best

which money could buy."[180] Morris was remembered by historians in a capitalist world

not for creating a book that was an object, but for opening up further markets, allowing

the tendrils of commodified ethereality to weave its way ever further into everyday life.

Those most invested in capitalist viewpoints, the wealthy audience buying

Kelmscott books, were also less open to seeing in a non-capitalist mode, or passing the

idea on to the general populace. "I aim at the idea and the ideal, and never get beyond

the 'collector'," Cobden-Sanderson declared; an idea that Morris would have probably

agreed with.[181] In 1900 C.R. Ashbee, who would take many of the Kelmscott printers

and typefaces for the Essex House Press,

> visiting the Caxton Club, a collectors' organization in Chicago,
> heard the members speak of 'Morrises' as though they were
> particularly lucrative shares: one man expressed his enthusiasm for
> the rising value of the Kelmscott books by declaring that 'no trust
> that ever was formed has paid such a rate of interest'.[182]

Although Morris found an audience for the books produced, it was perhaps not the one

that he was looking for, to say the least. This is not to say that wealthy collectors have

any less of need of a *thing* than anything else, but that the way these collectors viewed

'Morrises' was completely at odds with seeing the book as a *thing*. In fact, the proposed

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[180] Ibid., 310.
[181] Ibid., 275.
[182] Ibid.

thing is not even a commodity anymore, but a share; a complete monetary abstraction that does not even grasp at the real, as even the poor Victorian books that Morris criticized did. Instead of being most interested in the *thing*, the collector covets the ownership of an object. It is not the object per se, but the power granted by that object as belonging to them, and this pride can be seen in such a small thing as their behavior towards the "Morrises", which become more symbols of money, power, than they do *things* in and of themselves. Although the behavior of the collector is undoubtedly focused on the object, the object becomes more a way of exercising their desire, than an object in and of itself; in other words, it fully becomes a commodity. The object being treated as placeholder for monetary value, and all the things that go with that, only further etherealizes the object, the *thing*. This issue of ownership is only further proven by these same book collectors turning to the unornamented and unillustrated private press books being produced only years later.

On top of this, the behavior of the collectors, the audience of the Kelmscott Press, drove up the prices of the books. In 1891, a magazine titled *Athanaeum*, which first broke the news about the Kelmscott Press printing *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, announced in a subsequent issue that "the fact is on the first announcement in the Athenaeum there was a rush to Reeves & Turner and they sold every copy long before the price was announced."[183] The fact that the book sold out before the price was announced places the customers as wealthy: wealthy enough that they could purchase something that would certainly turn out to be expensive without knowing what the extent of that expense may be. The wealth of the customers, along with the continuing and

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[183] Ibid., 102.

increasing prestige and popularity of the Kelmscott Press, allowed book dealers to hold

Kelmscott books in stock as their value almost exponentially increased, something that

dealers readily did.[184] An 1899 letter from a bookseller to Cockerell gleefully records

that "the K.P. books keep up in a wonderful way! Shelley £23 – & Keats £26! And we

were told they were dear at £3.15 – & 30/-."[185] The Kelmscott books come to be

described not as 'Shelley: Beautiful – & Keats: Wondrous', but as pound valuations. The

value of *thing* in itself slips ever further and further away in its commodification.

Further, this drastic increase in price, a more than 500% increase on an already high price

(in 2005 currency, this meant the difference between about £200 and £1300, for a book

no less!), made the books unavailable to anyone but the collectors who did not need the

sensory event produced by the *thing*, only the existence and ownership of an object, for

intense sensuous feeling.[186]

Morris's audience was so deeply entrenched in commodified modes of vision that

even the overwhelming power of the combination of Morris's and Burne-Jones's designs

in the *Chaucer* could not bring them under the spell of its material existence, could not

show them forgotten ways of seeing. Despite the tireless fight that Morris fought against

the capitalist systems overseeing art, which forced upon the viewer its commodified

mode of seeing, he also seems to have realized that there was no solution to be found,

writing late in his life that

> in spite of all the success I have had, I have not failed to be
> conscious that the art I have been helping to produce would fall
> with the death of a few of us who really care about it, that a reform

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[184] Ibid., 194.
[185] Ibid.
[186] "Currency Converter," The National Archives,
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp#mid.

> in art which is founded on individualism must perish with the
> individuals who have set it going. Both my historical studies and
> my practical conflict with the philistinism of modern society have
> *forced* on me the conviction that art cannot have a real life and
> growth under the present system of commercialism and profit-
> mongering.[187]

Sadly, Morris seems to have painted an accurate picture in this bleak portrait. After the

death of those few individuals who saw this mode of vision forward, like Morris and

Burne-Jones who would pass in 1896 and 1898 respectively, came the death too of their

attempted reform: of art, of the world, of life. This double death ended in what this study

has already surveyed: future designers picking and choosing from Morris the elements

that suited them best, but never approaching what was at the heart of the Kelmscott Press;

designers approaching the Kelmscott for its typography but ignoring its materiality.

Peterson ends his book *A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*

with a third death, and that is the death of the book, writing, in 1991, "Morris's

astonishingly accurate prediction of the death of the book as a central cultural artefact in

the twentieth century, with moral and social consequences we cannot yet gauge, makes

the Kelmscott Press seem, more and more, like the end rather than the beginning of

something good."[188] This conclusive statement begs a question: What is the purpose of

Kelmscott books for us today, if there is any at all?

To attempt to answer the first question in a rather short space, the purpose of the

Kelmscott books for us today is the same as it was when they were created: to find

ourselves pushed ever closer to the phenomenologically known world and not the

economic graphs imposing themselves on it. It is to have this interaction with a *thing* and

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[187] Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, 65.
[188] Ibid., 313.

pursue the non-commodified modes of vision that it opens up to us. If anything, the

Kelmscott books are more important today than they have ever been before. With the

commodification, and ensuing dematerialization, of nearly every physical object today,

the importance of *things* becomes ever more important. Not only are books being

replaced (by e-readers as well as free pdfs online), but so too are other media like CDs,

vinyl, DVDs, etc. (by streaming services), and visual art (by pictures found on google

images coming to substitute for the actual art piece), to name but a few. Even our

conversations with others are constantly mediated by technology, or at the very least,

technology becomes another partner in the conversation. On the other hand, is the

modern craft movement, which, though mostly rather naïve and tied at the hip to

capitalism's structures, is inevitably focused on the object and interaction with the object,

whether that be craft beer or anything made in Brooklyn. To come back to the Kelmscott

Press, the Kelmscott books as *things* are infinitely important to us today in testing if there

even can be, and what the importance of, connection with and appreciation of the

physical world, in our increasingly unphysical world. Intense physical connection with

something seems like an experience that should not be forgotten in our increasingly

technologically mediated interaction with the world.

How we interact with the Kelmscott becomes important to the modern process of

coming to know the sheer physicality of an object then, and seeing how this sheer

physicality can enrich the everyday. So how does one interact with a Kelmscott book

today? Skoblow writes that

> to engage the Kelmscott directly, to take the books in hand, one
> generally must go to one of the great plutocrat libraries—the
> British, say, the Morgan, or the Huntington—to which access is

> controlled and in which contact with the objects is strictly
> monitored…I have sat with the books in these places, calling their
> weighty delicacies forth from hidden stacks, attended by
> instructions and prohibitions—a bit more carefully managed,
> perhaps, than Pleasure is pleased to be.[189]

This compromise of having to enter into a space not your own to view the Kelmscott

books under supervision changes several things about experiencing the Kelmscott,

paradoxically increasing the physical power of the Kelmscott, while, at the same time,

also making its power less effective.

The challenge it takes to see an original Kelmscott book (I, in fact, have not yet

had the pleasure) makes it so that if one does go through the process of coming to interact

with the book, the aim of the interaction is not literary or further deciphering of the

images. If one wanted to do either of these things they could simply pick up a paperback

from their local bookstore or favored online retailer, or travel online to view an online

facsimile of a Kelmscott book (more on that in a moment). No, if one goes through all

the trouble of seeing a Kelmscott book, the aim is to interact with the book, both

physically and visual-physically. Instead of a Kelmscott book roaring out the fact of its

physicality for everyone to hear, the reader/viewer recognizes the physicality of the

sensual event of Kelmscott interaction before it even happens (Oh! how I fantasize for it).

The physical importance of the Kelmscott is, I presume, only heightened by the sterility

of the environment, as well as the process of entering that environment, something like

that oddly full emptiness one feels in a doctor's office. Yet, is the modern encounterer,

with the Kelmscott book-object-*thing*, not simply fulfilling their desire for interaction

with the authentic object instead of actual, sincere interaction with the *thing*; are they not

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[189] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 246.

creating a simulacrum of sincere experience, another curtain they must attempt to wade through, never quite reaching the window behind and basking in the light? Is there such a thing as actual, sincere interaction or is that simply paradoxical, a searching for something more authentic than can be had, even from the supposed sumptuousness of the Kelmscott? In a similar way to how the collector's desire for intense sensuous feeling is had from ownership, is this "cult of beauty for modern scholar-priests," as Skoblow calls the Kelmscott, not doing the same thing in sublimating their desire for intense sensuous feeling to the concept of actual interaction rather than finding it in actual interaction?[190]

Instead of following these queries, for which would take another thesis to even explore the possibilities of any answers, let us instead focus on how most interact with the productions of the Kelmscott Press today. Instead of going to one of those "plutocrat libraries," which instead remains some kind of dream of what interaction with the world *could* be (an imagined experience eclipsing the real), most today interact with the Kelmscott through some combination of facsimiles (of various varieties, whether that be physical, CD-ROM, or virtual) and illustrations, divorced from their original context (also both in books and online). For the present study, I have used a combination of such diverse modes of interaction as a 1958 World Publishing Company facsimile of the 1896 *Chaucer* in a slightly reduced size and with all red ink replaced by black, a 1973 Dover book of *Ornamentation & Illustrations from The Kelmscott Chaucer*, which takes nearly all of the pages of the *Chaucer* with ornament and illustration and arranges them together, one after another, virtual facsimiles of a multitude of Kelmscott books found on the "William Morris Archive", as well as a multitude of singular images quelled from

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[190] Ibid.

google image searches and the illustrations within the books and journal articles that inform this study.

The only two authors I have found who comment on interacting with the Kelmscott in the modern day, Boos and Skoblow, have wildly varying opinions on the various ways the modern person can interact with the Kelmscott. Boos, who is in fact the editor and creator of the "William Morris Archive" mentioned above, writes that

> before they vanish from the face of the earth, well-crafted 'virtual' reproductions of Morris's books may encourage more readers than he ever imagined to set aside for a moment the 'blank everyday,' contemplate his hopelessly utopian ideals, and hope with him 'that real history…[may be] no dead thing, but the living bond of the hopes of the past, the present, and the future.[191]

On the other hand, writing on the *Chaucer*, Skoblow writes that "the Dover book of *Ornamentation and Illustrations* and the Octavo CD-ROM [of the *Chaucer*, on two disks,] both, with telling helplessness, and however pleasurably, reduce the experience to a dissemination of data; but as any fetishist will attest, this is to miss the point precisely."[192]

My own thoughts on these mediated interactions to the Kelmscott lie somewhere in between and outside of both of theirs. Skoblow is certainly right in pointing out that these mediated entities are missing something. The difference in material presence between an actual Kelmscott volume and these mediated versions is stunning, so much more so in the small, so not of the Kelmscott, details of these mediated attempts, such as the various differing page sizes of my facsimile of the *Chaucer*. The mediated versions, in attempting at approaching the originals, almost highlight their difference, their

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[191] Boos, "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press," 81.
[192] Skoblow, "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern," 254.

absurdity. The virtual facsimiles that can be found on Boos' "William Morris Archive"

force the reader/viewer to, almost painfully, attempt to turn the page by grabbing it with

their mouse and pulling it across the screen as if their hand was turning the page. When

the reader/viewer finally does turn the page, the exaggerated sound of a page turning can

be heard: *schwip*. At first the difficulty of navigating becomes an annoyance, but this

annoyance quickly becomes a yearning for an actual book, any book at all, but a

Kelmscott one most of all. The awkward navigating of a virtual facsimile, as well as the

quieter annoyances of paper facsimiles, makes one yearn for an actual Kelmscott volume,

for any intense feeling spurred on by the actual material world at all.

Where is one to find the "blank everyday" if not in a Kelmscott volume? The

answer is, of course, the rest of the material universe; the book beside you, your dinner

table, an odd, ornate light switch, hands, legs, trees, rivers, birdsong, the horizon, the dark

brown mud splattered on the white of a house you walk by everyday never having

noticed before, the light of the stoplights pooling up on Main Street as one looks out

across the river towards downtown Orono on a rainy night. Morris's goal was never the

creation of fetish objects, as Skoblow asserts, but the creation of *things* that teach the

reader/viewer to be more *in* their everyday world, *in* the actual, immediate experience.

Just as how, during a youthful 1855 tour of medieval churches in Normandy, Morris

dryly recorded the stylistic details of mediaeval churches along with vivid descriptions of

the space around and between these architectural spaces, the Kelmscott project is less one

of creating exceptionally beautiful objects and more one of creating exceptionally

beautiful objects that lead the reader/viewer to the world outside of the book and give

them eyes to find the beauty there.[193] It is never the object Morris is after. It is the

endowment of the world with the same profound meaning attributed to the art object.

And, although this endowment through a Kelmscott Press book seems unattainable,

Morris's tiresome work, in all its various guises, is still worthwhile today, if only for its

gentle nudging towards profound, worldly meaning.

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[193] Miele, "Morris and Conservation," 39.

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